



ENGLAND IN EARLY AND  
MEDIEVAL TIMES  
(TO 1485)

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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# ENGLAND IN EARLY AND MEDIEVAL TIMES

(TO 1485)

BY

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"ENGLAND IN TUDOR AND STUART TIMES,"

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## PREFACE

THIS book is, like my "England in Modern Times" and "England in Tudor and Stuart Times," primarily designed for the use of classes studying for School Certificate and Matriculation Examinations.

These examinations have a great and increasing influence on the aims and methods of our Secondary Schools. It has long been customary to decry that influence as a curse to the true educationist ; but as regards History, at any rate, the type of paper set has in recent years undergone a notable change for the better. So marked has been this development that the text-books of a generation ago are now almost useless. Step by step the subject is becoming a means of bringing young people into contact with the culture-epoch into which they have been born, of giving them some insight into the interplay of character and destiny, of helping them to understand the social, political, and economic conditions in which their lives will be lived. Moreover, it is now generally recognised that most boys and girls of fifteen or sixteen have reached a stage of mental development in which the effort to group and interpret facts has become more pleasurable and more profitable than the mere comprehension of them.

This humanising of History is still in its early stages. It demands the co-operation of teacher and examiner, for in the conditions which prevail in our schools to-day neither can move very far or very fast without the other. My ambition in writing this book has been to make such contribution to the process as lay in my power. I have not tried to make the subject seem *easy* : my aim has rather been to make it seem *worth while*—to help boys and girls to realise that the exhilaration of rising to a broader mental horizon is ample compensation for the effort involved.

There are two methods open to the writer of such a book as this. On the one hand he may plough steadily through years and reigns, sacrificing co-ordination of ideas to chronological sequence. On the other, he may devote long passages to particular aspects of his subject, to the dire confusion of the pupil's time-sense. The plan of this book is an attempt to find a middle way between these extremes. Its chapters are of approximately uniform length—a length which experience has shown to be readily assimilable in one lesson-period. Each chapter deals with a definite topic, subdivided into sections with appropriate sub-titles ; but the sequence of these topics has been contrived with a view to maintaining the sense of onward-moving time. At the end of each chapter suggestions are made for discussion, either orally in class or as themes for written work ; and there are test questions at the end of each of the three Books into which the work is divided. The chronological backbone of the book is supplied by Date Charts, in which references are made to the sections of the text which deal with the matter in question ; and similar references are given in the course of the letterpress itself.

# CONTENTS

## BOOK I

### THE FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLAND (To 1066)

INTRODUCTION . . . . . (p. 1)

#### CHAP. I. THE PRE-HISTORY OF ENGLAND

§ 1. Back Through the Ages. § 2. The Iberians. § 3. The Downland Civilisation. § 4. The Coming of Metal. § 5. Celtic Britain . . . . . (p. 3)

#### CHAP. II. ROMAN BRITAIN (55 B.C.—A.D. 410)

§ 6. "Veni, Vidi, Vici." § 7. "The Grandeur that was Rome." § 8. The Conquest of Britain. § 9. Roman Civilisation in Britain. § 10. The Empire in Decline . . . . . (p. 12)

#### CHAP. III. THE NORDIC MIGRATION (400–600)

§ 11. The End of Roman Britain. § 12. Behind the Curtain. § 13. Celtic Christianity. § 14. Growth of the Catholic Church. § 15. Anglo-Saxon Christianity . . . . . (p. 21)

#### CHAP. IV. ENGLAND UNDER "THE HEPTARCHY" (600–830)

§ 16. "Eorls" and "Ceorls." § 17. Rural Life. § 18. The Great Archbishop Theodore. § 19. Muhammad and Charlemagne. § 20. Offa and Egbert . . . . . (p. 32)

#### CHAP. V. THE DANES

§ 21. The Coming of the Norsemen. § 22. The Vikings in Action. § 23. First Settlements in England. § 24. Alfred the Great in War and Peace. § 25. The Re-Conquest of the Danelaw . . . . . (p. 44)

#### CHAP. VI. THE ANGLO-SAXON KINGS OF ENGLAND (924–1014)

§ 26. What England Owes to the Danes. § 27. The Norsemen in France. § 28. The Hey-Day of the Anglo-Saxon Monarchy. § 29. The First Great English Churchman—Statesman. § 30. The Second Danish Conquest (p. 56)

## CHAP. VII. ANGLO-DANE AND ANGLO-NORMAN (1016-1066)

§ 31. King Cnut. § 32. The End of Danish Rule. § 33. A Crowned Monk. § 34. The Great Earl Godwin. § 35. The Great Earl Harold. (p. 66)

## CHAP. VIII. LIFE IN OLD ENGLAND

§ 36. Village Life. § 37. The Origin of Feudalism. § 38. The Theory of Feudalism. § 39. Noble, Yeoman, and Serf. § 40. Early English Literature. (p. 74)

## CHAP. IX. THE NORMAN CONQUEST (1066)

§ 41. Normandy and its Duke. § 42. Duke William States his Case. § 43. "It's an Ill Wind . . ." § 44. Senlac Field. § 45. After the Battle. (p. 83)

## BOOK II

## THE SUBMERGENCE OF THE ENGLISH (1066-1272)

INTRODUCTION . . . . . (p. 93)

## CHAP. X. THE CONQUEROR (1066-1087)

§ 46. The Conquest Completed. § 47. Feudalism, Limited. § 48. Baronial Unrest. § 49. The Conqueror and the Church. § 50. A Great Ruler (p. 95)

## CHAP. XI. THE CONQUEROR'S SONS (1087-1135)

§ 51. William the Red-Faced. § 52. The Hildebrandine Church *versus* The Norman Monarchy. § 53. The First Crusade. § 54. "Henry the Educated." § 55. "The Lion of Justice" . . . . . (p. 107)

## CHAP. XII. BECKET (1135-1170)

§ 56. Feudalism, Unlimited. § 57. Henry of Anjou. § 58. King and Chancellor. § 59. "Benefit of Clergy." § 60. "The Holy Blissful Martyr" (p. 117)

## CHAP. XIII. REFORMS AND REBELLIONS (1172-1189)

§ 61. The Conquest of Ireland. § 62. Family Quarrels. § 63. The Common Law. § 64. Trial by Jury. § 65. The Last Decade . . . . . (p. 129)

## CHAP. XIV. THE END OF THE ANGEVIN EMPIRE (1189-1204)

§ 66. Cœur de Lion. § 67. The Third Crusade. § 68. England in the Reign of Richard. § 69. The Loss of Normandy and Anjou. § 70. The Results of the Separation . . . . . (p. 139)

CHAP. XV. THE GREAT CHARTER (1204-1216)

§ 71. The Quarrel with the Barons. § 72. The Quarrel with the Pope.  
§ 73. Bouvines. § 74. "The Great Charter of English Liberties." § 75. King  
John comes to a Bad End . . . . . (p. 149)

CHAP. XVI. THE REIGN OF HENRY III (1216-1272)

§ 76. The King's Minority. § 77. The Great Justiciar. § 78. The Personal  
Rule of Henry III. § 79. The Provisions of Oxford. § 80. "The Good Earl  
Simon" . . . . . (p. 158)

CHAP. XVII. THE ZENITH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

§ 81. The Papal Theocracy. § 82. Monks and Friars. § 83. The Cathedral  
Builders. § 84. The Universities. § 85. The Merchant Gilds . . . (p. 169)

BOOK III

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ENGLISH (1272-1485)

INTRODUCTION . . . . . (p. 181)

CHAP. XVIII. EDWARD THE FIRST AS LEGISLATOR (1272-1296)

§ 86. Every Inch a King. § 87. "The English Justinian." § 88. Three  
Great Statutes. § 89. King Edward's Parliaments. § 90. The Expulsion of  
the Jews . . . . . (p. 183)

CHAP. XIX. EDWARD THE FIRST AS KING OF BRITAIN  
(1276-1307)

§ 91. The Conquest of Wales. § 92. The Scottish Arbitration. § 93. The  
Franco-Scottish Alliance. § 94. Confirmatio Cartarum. § 95. The End of  
the Reign . . . . . (p. 193)

CHAP. XX. BARONIAL OLIGARCHY (1307-1327)

§ 96. The Lords Ordainers. § 97. The Suppression of the Templars. § 98.  
Bannockburn. § 99. The End of the Oligarchy. § 100. Downfall . . (p. 202)

CHAP. XXI. CRÉCY AND THE BLACK DEATH (1330-1360)

§ 101. The Outbreak of the Great War. § 102. A National State *versus*  
a Feudal State. § 103. Crécy and Calais. § 104. The Black Death. § 105.  
Poitiers and Brétigny . . . . . (p. 211)

CHAP. XXII. "A LAME AND IMPOTENT CONCLUSION"  
(1360-1377)

§ 106. The Conquests in France undone. § 107. The Birth of the  
"Lancastrian Party." § 108. The Wool Trade. § 109. Wycliffe Attacks  
the Church's Wealth. § 110. Wycliffe Attacks the Church's Doctrines.  
(p. 222)

## CHAP. XXIII. THE TRAGEDY OF KING RICHARD II (1377-1399)

§ 111. The Decay of the Manorial System. § 112. The Peasants' Revolt.  
 § 113. Another Baronial Oligarchy. § 114. The King's Triumph. § 115. The  
 Lancastrian Revolution . . . . . (p. 234)

## CHAP. XXIV. THE LANCASTRIAN USURPATION (1399-1414)

§ 116. The Birth of Our Mother Tongue. § 117. The Persecution of the  
 Lollards. § 118. Rebellions. § 119. "The Lancastrian Experiment." § 120.  
 Henry the Fifth . . . . . (p. 246)

## CHAP. XXV. GLORY AND HUMILIATION IN FRANCE (1415-1452)

§ 121. "Fair Stood the Wind for France." § 122. Agincourt. § 123.  
 The Maid. § 124. "Livery and Maintenance." § 125. York and Lancaster  
 . . . . . (p. 255)

## CHAP. XXVI. THE WARS OF THE ROSES (1460-1485)

§ 126. The Prologue—St. Albans. § 127. The First Phase—Wakefield and  
 Towton. § 128. The Second Phase—Barnet and Tewkesbury. § 129. The  
 Epilogue—Bosworth Field . . . . . (p. 267)

## CHAP. XXVII. THE GREAT TRANSITION

§ 130. The Church Loses Grip. § 131. Nationalism Replaces Feudalism.  
 § 132. National Economic Policy. § 133. An Age of Incubation. § 134.  
 Emancipation . . . . . (p. 277)

INDEX . . . . . (p. 288)

## MAPS

	PAGE
Destruction of Roman Britain . . . . .	23
England in the Eighth Century . . . . .	41
Viking Routes . . . . .	47
England in the Time of Alfred . . . . .	51
The Angevin Empire . . . . .	122
France in the Time of Edward III . . . . .	220
Medieval London . . . . .	240-41
France in March 1429 . . . . .	261
England in later Medieval Times . . . . .	269

## DATE CHARTS

Early Days in Britain . . . . .	2
The Heptarchy . . . . .	31
The Ascendency of Wessex . . . . .	43
The Anglo-Saxon Kings of Britain . . . . .	55
The Norman Kings of England . . . . .	94
The Angevin Kings of England . . . . .	118
The Three Edwards . . . . .	182
The Later Plantagenets . . . . .	233

## GENEALOGICAL TREES

The Anglo-Saxon Kings of England . . . . .	60
The Later Pre-Conquest Kings . . . . .	64
The Norman Kings . . . . .	106
The Early Plantagenets . . . . .	145
The Claims of Edward III to the French Throne . . . . .	210
York and Lancaster . . . . .	226





# ENGLAND IN EARLY AND MEDIEVAL TIMES

## BOOK I

### The Foundations of England

(To 1066)

“NORMAN, Saxon and Dane are we,” wrote Tennyson, and we have a dash of the blood of a good many other races in our veins as well. For the geographical configuration of our island—rockbound and forbidding on the west, but sloping easily towards east and south—offered a standing invitation to the successive peoples that dominated the lands on the other side of the narrow seas : Iberian, Celt, Roman, Teuton, and Norseman. And there is another respect in which our geographical position has affected our national character. Folk-wandering by land has always been going on, but the difficulties and dangers of transporting whole tribes, including womenfolk, across the sea has ensured that the stock from which we are descended was of exceptional courage and hardihood.

This first Book of our History will tell how the racial elements were thrown one by one into the crucible, wherein, after a process of fusion which went on for centuries, the British nation was formed.

# EARLY DAYS IN BRITAIN

B.C.				B.C.
1600	Stonehenge built? (§4)			1600
1500				1500
1400	Bronze coming into general use (§4)	LATER MEGA- LITHIC	Moses	1400
1300			Joshua	1300
1200			XXII Dynasty in Egypt	1200
1100			King David	1100
1000		BRITAIN		1000
900				900
800			1st. Olympic Games Foundation of Rome	800
700			The Buddha	700
600	Arrival of Goideis(?) (§5)	CELTIC BRITAIN	Jews at Babylon	600
500			Confucius	500
400	Arrival of Brythons(?) (§5)		Periclean Athens (§5)	400
300			Aristotle Alexander	300
200		BRITAIN	The Punic Wars	200
100	Arrival of Belgae(?) (§5)		The Gracchi	100
0	Visit of Julius Caesar (§6)		Roman Empire Founded (§7)	0
A.D.		ROMAN BRITAIN		A.D.
100	Roman Conquest (§7)		Nero	100
200	Hadrian's Wall (§8)		Reorganisation of Empire (§10)	200
300			Christianity adopted (§10)	300
400	Anglo-Saxon Settlements proceeding (§12)		Roman Empire breaks up (§10)	400
500				500

*N.B. To show the beginning of the New Stone Age in Britain on the same scale this Chart would have to be about 2 feet long; to reach the end of the last Ice Age would require 6 feet; to show the period of Paleolithic Man it would have to be nearly as long as a cricket pitch; while to indicate the probable date of the coal forests it would need to stretch for two or three miles.*

## CHAPTER I

### The Pre-History of England

*We must begin the study of our country's history with a glimpse at the people who inhabited it during the ages before the earliest of those written records upon which true historical science is based. Our great difficulty in dealing with this "pre-history" is to realise the flight of time; for the Megalithic and Celtic Ages which we shall discuss in this chapter lasted at least five times as long as the twenty centuries which have passed since they ended.*

#### 1. *Back Through the Ages*

Let us imagine that we have invented a machine which can transport us through time as an aeroplane travels through space, and that we are speeding backwards through the years at the headlong rate of a century a minute. We shall reach the Napoleonic Wars in less than ninety seconds, and about two minutes later we may catch a glimpse of the Armada sailing up the Channel. Another five minutes will have carried us past the Norman Conquest, and ten more to the epoch of the birth of Christ and the foundation of the Roman Empire. By the time we have been an hour and a half on our journey all signs of civilisation will have disappeared, and if we continue to hurtle through time for about four hours we shall reach the last great "Ice Age." As far south as Alps and Pyrenees there is nothing but a wilderness of frozen snow and grinding ice-rivers, swept by howling winds beneath leaden skies.

The general contours of the countryside as we know them to-day were taking shape under the pressure of the great glaciers; but at this stage of world history human life had been

frozen out of existence in these latitudes—all was bleak desolation. Before the chilling ice-cap had spread over it, Europe had been inhabited for tens of thousands of years by successive races of ape-men, whose fossilised bones and roughly formed flint implements enable us to give a good guess at the sort of lives they led. They clothed themselves in the skins of animals ; for food they gathered berries and roots and hunted animals ; they built no homes, but dwelt in caves ; they used fire-hardened wood and flakes of flint for tools and weapons ; they lived in small family groups without social ranks or tribal organisation ; and they had no religious ideas beyond a vague fear of the dark and of the forces of nature. Above all, their brains were not sufficiently developed to enable them to learn readily by experience. We could travel backwards at the rate of a century a minute for hours without seeing any notable change in the way of life of these *Earlier Paleolithic* men.

In those pre-glacial days our country formed part of the mainland of Europe ; the Thames and the Humber meandered out to join a mighty Rhine stream that flowed down what is now the bed of the North Sea. The climate must have been a great deal more genial than it is to-day, for tigers and hippopotamuses lived here. As the Ice Age drew on, these animals retreated southwards, and the temperature of Europe never recovered sufficiently to tempt them back again.

When, somewhere about 25,000 B.C., another change in the relationship of Earth to Sun made these parts again habitable, new and improved types of men spread across Europe. Ages of practice had given these races great skill in chipping flints into useful shapes ; and from the fact that they buried their dead we can judge that they must have acquired the idea of a future life—possibly from dreams. These were what archæologists call *Later Paleolithic* men, but it is very doubtful whether any of them reached England. Indeed, they would have found it almost impossible to get here, for the first great event in our history had now taken place—Britain had become an island. It may have been the melting of the ice-cap, it may have been some subterranean upheaval which changed the contours of the land surface ; what is certain is that such low-lying plains as the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the English Channel were

flooded. And the fact that our country is an island—sloping towards the mainland, and, therefore, approachable to European adventurers, but separated from it by a moat which only the adventurous can cross—has had a profound effect upon our national character and destiny.

## 2. *The Iberians*

Let us, therefore, reverse our time-machine and swing back to about 10,000 B.C., when the pioneers of the Iberian race of men ventured across the Channel to make homes for themselves. During the long centuries of the last Ice Age this race had been developing the elements of civilised life in the more genial Mediterranean regions, and their northward wandering may have begun when the ocean began to trickle past the rock of Gibraltar and to flood the plains of their homeland. Wherever they settled they carried their social customs and religious ideas, and we find traces of them not only in France, Spain, and Britain, but in North Africa.

The period during which they formed the population of Britain was four times as long as the whole Christian era ; and during that time successive waves of them brought fresh ideas and inventions from the cradle of their civilisation in the Levant. Nevertheless, their manner of life preserved certain general characteristics during the whole era, and it is of great interest to us to enquire what that manner of life was. For, unlike the men of the Old Stone Age, these *Iberians* were our ancestors. The Paleolithic races were all in turn destroyed in the struggle for existence ; they had their day and ceased to be as completely as the giant reptiles of the Mesozoic Age. But life has been continuous in these islands from the day when the first Iberian people landed until to-day. Some of their blood is in all of us British, especially in the small dark folk so common in South Wales, Ireland, and the Scottish Highlands ; and some of their ideas still form the background of our minds.

This *Neolithic* or New Stone Age is so called because men had by this time discovered new methods of fashioning stone implements. They ground and polished them, instead of merely chipping them with another flint, and they developed great

skill in fitting them with wooden shafts and handles to give leverage. And these later men had taken even more important steps towards civilised life than mere improvements in flint weapons.

For instance, instead of being dependent on hunting they kept herds of sheep and cattle ; and instead of merely gathering wild fruits where they found them they grew crops of wheat and barley. When men begin to *produce* their food, instead of merely taking it as nature provides it, they have made an immense stride ; for they have begun to look ahead and to sacrifice present enjoyment for the sake of the future. A race that has domesticated animals and has learnt to cultivate crops can accumulate goods and chattels for its comfort and convenience. These people gradually evolved pottery, spinning, and weaving, and they learnt to construct houses of wood and mud thatched with reeds, instead of being obliged to live, like their Paleolithic predecessors, in districts where there were natural caves.

All this building of huts, herding of cattle, polishing of flints, and cultivating of crops tended to bring men together to live in communities, which is an essential condition for progress in ideas ; but these occupations also made an end of the long hours of idleness enjoyed by the more primitive hunter. Man had already begun to learn the first hard lesson of life—that in order to enjoy advantages one is compelled to work for them. Thus, we find that, whereas the Later Paleolithic men had amused themselves by drawing wonderfully vivid pictures of animals on the walls of their caves and had scratched similar designs on their bone implements, the men of this later age left no traces of such artistic relaxations. They were too busy.

### 3. *The Downland Civilisation*

The countryside and the climate were by this time much as they are to-day ; but since the low-lying parts of the country consisted chiefly of forests made impenetrable by dense undergrowth, or of rivers bordered by wide marshes, the Neolithic people lived chiefly on the uplands. We can still trace the trackways which they made along the Downs, the earthen ramparts

which they threw up to enclose their villages and cattle-compounds, the shallow dew-ponds which they lined with a mixture of chaff and clay to hold the moisture so precious on the uplands, the hillside terraces which they made for their crops with infinite labour of antler-pick and shoulder-blade shovel. One could travel on these "green roads of England" along the Cotswolds, the Chilterns, the Mendips, and the North and South Downs. They run almost continuously from the moors of Devon to those of Yorkshire; and at their terminal points near Poole and Brighton there are extensive earthworks which suggest a regular traffic with the Continent. The node or central point of the whole system was in Wiltshire. Near Avebury in that county can be seen the scattered remains of what was once a vast open-air temple. Massive stones were set upright in the ground in a great circle a quarter of a mile across with a ditch thirty feet deep all round it. Within this circle there were two smaller rings of stones, and an avenue of them led to an immense mound known as Silbury Hill, the largest artificial hill in the world. Altogether there must have been something like five hundred stones gathered together, and the whole enclosure would hold five or six thousand people.

All this proves that these folk were far advanced along the road to civilisation, for great numbers of them must have worked in co-operation to move these mighty stones and to set them up according to a regular design; and they must have had deep and earnest ideas about religion to have taken so much trouble with their rudimentary tools. It is obvious, too, that they had distinctions of social rank, for they buried *some* of their dead in stone vaults over which they heaped great mounds of earth. Many of these mounds are found in various parts of the country, but they are especially numerous in the neighbourhood of Avebury, where they seem to form a sort of burial ground around a vast cathedral. And the fact that they contain utensils and tools and weapons shows us that the men who made them believed in a future life. We sometimes call this period between about 10,000 and 1,000 B.C. *the Megalithic Age*, because the people seem to have felt that there was something sacred about great upright slabs of stone. In various parts of Western Europe we find these "menhirs," often set up in



circles like that at Avebury, though the latter was the largest in the world ; and the instinct survives in us right down to the present day—witness the Washington Obelisk, the Nelson Column, and the Cenotaph.

#### 4. *The Coming of Metal*

Towards the end of the megalithic millennium (say about 1700 B.C.) traders from the Continent began to bring over implements made from a substance altogether different from the bone and flint and staghorn which had hitherto been used for the purpose. Men had long since learnt how to heat gold and copper and fashion them into ornaments for great chiefs and their women-folk, but neither of these substances was hard enough to be of use for tools and weapons. It was probably quite by chance that some Levantine or Mesopotamian copper-worker discovered that if his metal were mixed with a certain proportion of tin, the compound had very different qualities from either of its constituents. It was so hard that it would take a sharp cutting edge, and when blunted by use it could be re-sharpened on a grindstone. The use of this "bronze" gradually spread all over Europe and Asia,\* until at last—centuries after its first invention—it found its way into Britain. We can imagine with what delighted amazement the islanders would handle and test tools made of this wonderful new substance ; they must have felt much like the men of our own century felt about flying-machines and radio-telephony. And now began the importance of our island as a trading centre, for it contained considerable supplies of tin, a metal which was rare and precious in the Mediterranean countries. Cornwall, indeed, is one of the few places in the world where copper and tin are found close together. Naturally, it was not long before the islanders began to make bronze implements for themselves, though centuries more elapsed before the use of the metal became common.

At about the same epoch as the introduction of bronze a new wave of immigrants began to settle in Britain. These *Alpine* folk, as they are sometimes called, were superior in both

\* The weapons used by the Greeks and Trojans in Homer's "Iliad" were made of it.

intelligence and physique to the people they found here. Some of the latter were driven westwards into Wales and Cornwall, while others remained to be servants or wives of the stronger race and were gradually absorbed into it. The heads of the Alpine men were rounder than those of the earlier inhabitants, and (by a curious coincidence) so also were the barrows in which they buried their dead. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that they were fundamentally the same race and shared the same megalithic religious ideas. It was they who constructed (about 1,600 B.C.) what we now call *Stonehenge*. This is the best-preserved "cromlech" (stone circle) in the world. It was much more elaborate in design than that of Avebury, though much less spacious in conception, being hardly a quarter of the size. It gives us a striking glimpse of the length of past ages when we reflect that Avebury was probably as old when Stonehenge was made as Stonehenge is now.

For something like a thousand years that ring of trilithons on Salisbury Plain was the centre of the social and religious life of the people of this island. They flocked thither from all parts along the Downs for the great festival at midsummer, and they probably held a sort of fair there at the same time. By imperceptible stages the amenities of life improved. Bronze came into common use; potters learned to make strong and shapely jars and cups; spinners and weavers found out how to make really serviceable fabrics.

Then rumours began to be heard of a new race that had taken possession of the lands on the other side of the narrow seas—people bigger, fiercer, and more warlike than any of the Megalithic folk.

### 5. *Celtic Britain*

These were the *Celts*. They appear to have spread across Europe in successive waves, their main body still inhabiting the land between Danube and Rhine when their advanced parties had occupied Spain and France and were beginning to cross into Britain (about 600 B.C.). They had little difficulty in overcoming and dispossessing the Iberian natives, for they were far more of a fighting race, and they had the advantage of possessing weapons made of *iron*, a material as much superior to bronze

for the purpose as bronze had been to stone. They belonged to the Aryan group of peoples—quite distinct in origin from the Iberians—which became the dominant race not only in nearly all parts of Europe, but in Persia and India. They did not live like the Iberians in downland villages, but in tribal homesteads along the borders of the forests. As the young men of the tribe grew up they pushed forward to make homes for themselves ; and by this slow but steady movement they spread right across Europe.

The first of these Celtic peoples to settle in Britain were the *Goidels* or Gaels. Much as they differed from the conquered Iberians in race, speech, and way of life, they adopted many of their ideas. They took over some of their entrenchments and made others on a smaller scale for themselves. They used the stone circles as centres of their own religious life, which seems to have developed into a debased form of the nature-worship of the Iberians, with an elaborate hierarchy of professional priests called Druids. They cremated their dead, but often used existing burial-mounds in which to deposit the ashes. The lower ranks of their tribes intermarried with the natives and produced a mixed race ; but the chieftains prided themselves on the purity of their blood, as evidenced by their tall stature, fair skins, and reddish hair.

About two centuries later another Celtic race appeared—the *Brythons*, from whom we derive the race-name we use to-day. They were better equipped and more vigorous than the Gaels, whom they drove over to the western and northern parts of the island ; and the earliest history of Wales and Scotland consists of these struggles. Lastly, about 150 B.C. the Brythons were themselves expelled from south-eastern England by an even more advanced branch of the race—the *Belgic* Celts, who had lately gained the upper hand on the other side of the narrow seas.

The Celts developed along their own lines many of the crafts already practised by the Iberians—pottery, weaving, farming, and hut-building ; and they were probably the first inhabitants of Britain to breed horses and pigs. But their main occupation seems to have been inter-tribal warfare. Constant fighting prevented their making much progress in the arts of peace.

During the last six centuries of the pre-Christian era they were only gradually emerging from a mental and moral outlook corresponding to that of the modern Zulus, at a time when the most marvellous cultural developments were taking place on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. In Palestine the Jews were evolving the conception of a universal God instead of the local and tribal deities which had been worshipped hitherto ; the Phoenicians were connecting all parts of the known world through their trading activities, and were inventing our modern system of alphabetic writing ; among the Greeks there appeared that spirit of mental enterprise and that love of beauty to which our civilisation owes so much ; and the Romans were developing the idea of law, order, and good government.

Faint echoes of all this reached our far-off island now and again, chiefly through merchants who brought their wares to exchange for Cornish tin ; but the first time that the British Celts came into direct contact with the new Mediterranean culture was in 55 B.C.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *Trace the earliest stages of civilisation in Britain.*
- (2) *Write a dialogue between a Mediterranean visitor and a Celtic native, about 100 B.C.*

## CHAPTER II

### Roman Britain

(55 B.C.—A.D. 410)

*In this chapter we shall see how Britain became a part of the Roman Empire, and remained part of it for nearly four hundred years—longer than the period from the death of Henry VII to that of Queen Victoria.*

#### 6. “*Veni, Vidi, Vici*”

At about the same time that the foremost Celtic tribes were spreading across Europe, another Aryan race found its way into the Italian peninsula. There, by the mysterious processes of racial chemistry, the mixture of these folk with the Iberian natives produced a race which was destined to lay the foundations of the European civilisation of to-day.

One of their settlements, situated on the River Tiber and known as Roma, became supreme over all the surrounding neighbourhood. Its citizens developed a remarkable character of their own, a genius for order, system, discipline; and by degrees these qualities won for it dominion, first over the rest of Italy, then over all the shores of the Mediterranean, and in the end over almost the whole of the known world. But its governmental machinery was only suitable for a city-republic, and by the first century B.C. this municipal constitution was fast breaking down under the strain of ruling a vast empire. It became increasingly obvious to far-sighted Romans that the only form of government which could grapple with such a task was a centralised monarchy. The question was, who was to be the monarch? Several of the ambitious politicians who abounded in the city had designs on the position, but none dared avow them openly. Amongst these schemers was Caius Julius Cæsar, perhaps the man of greatest all-round ability that ever lived.

In 59 B.C. he obtained the post of Governor of Hither Gaul, with the command of a special expeditionary force which was to conquer the rest of what is now France. He took advantage of this opportunity to gain the personal support of an army and to advertise himself as a benefactor to the State, especially by the sale of prisoners of war as slaves. He has himself described the masterly campaigns by which he conquered Gaul, and in the course of his "Commentaries" he gives an account of the natives which has a special interest for us from the fact that these people were closely related in blood, speech, and ideas to the inhabitants of Britain.

By the summer of 55 B.C. he had reached the north-eastern shores of Gaul, and looked across the Dover Straits at the white walls of Britain. He suddenly decided to take some troops across and make a reconnaissance in force, to see if the country were worth conquering. He was impelled to do this largely because in his recent campaigns the Belgic Gauls had been supported by their kinsmen across the Straits; but in any case it would be a showy exploit which would make a great impression in Rome. The venture was not a great success, however. Before he had got many miles inland a great storm destroyed half his transports and he was compelled to concentrate his attention on repairing the rest and getting his men safely back to the mainland.

In the following year he made preparations for a regular campaign in Britain. The natives laid aside their incessant tribal feuds in the face of this invasion and formed a united force under the command of one Cassivelaunus. Nevertheless, the Romans defeated them in several sharp engagements, crossed the Thames at Brentford, and won a decisive victory near the modern St. Albans. At this stage Cæsar was recalled to his base by an attack on his fleet, and he finally decided to accept the submission and tribute offered by Cassivelaunus, and return to Gaul before the autumnal storms made the passage dangerous.

He never came again. During the following year his attention was taken up by a great rebellion among the conquered Gauls; and after that was quelled he was engaged for several years in a civil war with his political rivals. Successful in this contest, he was already exercising supreme power in the government and seemed to be on the point of assuming the title as well as the authority

of a monarch, when he was assassinated by a band of conspirators who claimed to be saving the republic from despotism.

7. "*The Grandeur that was Rome*"

The murder of Cæsar was followed by another decade of civil war, but in the end the change which he had foreseen came about: the government of the vast dominions of Rome fell into the hands of a single ruler. The first to hold this position was Cæsar's own adopted son, who became the Emperor Augustus Cæsar. It is noteworthy that the Latin word for his title, *imperator*, means merely "commander"; and he was careful to keep up the outward forms of the old republican constitution, though all real power was concentrated in his own hands.

The new system of government was a great success, and it gave Europe a longer period of peace than it has ever known since. The *pax Romana* was based on irresistible power. A highly effective military organisation, an inborn talent for administration among its leading men, and a system of roads intersecting the Empire in all directions, enabled the government to deal promptly with disorderly elements within and without; and these conditions led to a rapid increase in trade and in all the arts of civilisation. Commodities of every description poured into the capital, making it a centre of splendour, wealth, and power which overawed the world.

In our day Europe is divided into a number of countries whose inhabitants are intensely eager to preserve their own boundaries and languages and national characters; but in the days of the Roman Empire such feelings were unknown. For that Empire included the whole civilised world, which was ruled by the same system, and used the same official language everywhere. Natives of its outlying provinces were as eager to claim Roman citizenship as men born in the city itself. We remember the pride with which St. Paul, though "a citizen of no mean city" (Tarsus in Syria), declared himself a Roman. As time went on the highest officials and officers, including the Emperor himself, were often not Italians—sometimes not even Europeans—by birth.

The power of the Roman Empire was based on the armies which garrisoned its frontiers—the Rhine, the Danube, the

Euphrates, and the Sahara—where they occupied permanent stations and were kept up to strength by drafts from other provinces. There were in all some 300,000 soldiers, of two distinct types. (1) On the one hand there were the legions, about thirty in number, recruited from Roman citizens—not necessarily Italians, but men who had been brought up in contact with the Roman civilisation. Each legion included about 6,000 highly trained and completely equipped foot-soldiers, together with ancillary troops, such as cavalry for scouting, armourers, and hospital staff. It was commanded by a Roman of high rank, usually an ex-senator, with the military rank of *legatus legionis*. The chief subordinate officers were the sixty centurions, much in the position of our captains, but risen from the ranks. The men served for twenty years; they often married with native women and brought up their sons to join “the old regiment.” When they retired from service they were usually given as gratuity a plot of land, either near the military post where they had served, or in their native districts. (2) There were also auxiliary troops, recruited from the more primitive peoples on the outskirts of the Empire, but officered by Romans, and never allowed to serve near their own homes. These were organised in “cohorts” of between 500 and 1,000 men, partly infantry and partly cavalry. Their position was inferior to that of the legionaries in equipment, pay, and privileges.

### 8 *The Conquest of Britain*

The first three Emperors were too busy establishing the new system to trouble themselves about far-off Britain; but the fourth, Claudius, decided to bring the island within the Empire. In A.D. 43 he sent four legions and several thousands of auxiliary troops (about 40,000 men in all) to undertake the conquest, under a veteran commander named *Aulus Plautius*.

Since the fleeting visits of Julius Cæsar Roman ideas had been carried into Britain by the merchants who were constantly travelling backwards and forwards from Gaul, which by this time had become thoroughly Romanised. A chieftain named Cunobelinus (the chief character in Shakespeare’s “*Cymbeline*”) had lately been king of all southern Britain; he had coins stamped with his image and superscription after the Roman



fashion, and had friendly relationships with two of the earlier Emperors. But after his death the old tribal warfare had broken out again and this made it impossible for any effective resistance to be offered to the strong force which now invaded the country. Moreover, many of the natives, especially in the more civilised south, welcomed the prospect of becoming citizens of the great Empire.

The conquest was carried out in two stages. In the course of the first few years Aulus Plautius overran the south and midlands; and the legions gradually strengthened and extended their grip over these parts by their military roads and fortified camps; for the Roman soldier was as accustomed to the use of pick and shovel as to that of sword and javelin. Then came a check. The next commander, *Ostorius Scapula*, met with determined opposition in South Wales, where the natives were stirred up by *Caratacus*, the son of Cunobelinus. Eventually Caratacus and his family were captured and sent as prisoners to Rome, but Ostorius' successor, *Suetonius Paulinus*, had to deal with a new difficulty. While he was engaged in destroying the centre of the Druidic religion in Anglesey, word was brought that a great rising had taken place in eastern Britain, under the famous Queen *Boadicea* (more correctly Boudicca). The cruelty and rapacity of the officials appointed to administer the conquered territory had goaded the natives into rebellion, and they had massacred many of the Roman civilians who had come over to share the spoils of the new province. Suetonius hastened back and crushed the revolt; but he took steps to prevent the ill-treatment of the natives for the future.

The second stage in the conquest began under *Vespasian* (69-79) (afterwards Emperor) when northern England was subdued. One of the legions was now sent back to the Continent, and the stations of the others were fixed at Eburacum (York), Isca Silurum (Caerleon-on-Usk), and Deva (Chester). At the beginning of the second century the Emperor Hadrian decided to fix definite and permanent limits to the Empire, and made an elaborate scheme for the defence of these scientific frontiers. As part of this policy, all idea of extending the conquest to Ireland was abandoned (a most important fact in the subsequent history of that country), nor did the Romans make further

attempts to take permanent possession even of Wales and Scotland. The two legions on the Welsh borders kept in check the wild west-country Britons and protected the points vulnerable to the even wilder Picts from Ireland ; while the Goidelic Celts of Scotland were shut out by the mighty rampart of hewn stones known as *Hadrian's Wall*. This ran from Newcastle to Solway Firth. It was eight feet thick and sixteen feet high, with a ditch forty feet wide outside it, and it had sixteen strong forts with smaller turrets every few miles, garrisoned by auxiliary troops from the station of the Sixth Legion at York.

### 9. *Roman Civilisation in Britain*

The period of settled occupation which now began lasted for nearly three hundred years. As in other parts of the Empire, the troops were stationed near the frontiers, while the midlands and south hardly ever saw a soldier, except when some new draft marched along the roads to join one of the legions. The Brigantes, who inhabited what is now Yorkshire, rebelled more than once, and in the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius a futile attempt was made to hold down the fierce Celts beyond Hadrian's Wall by means of another wall between the Forth and the Clyde ; but the peaceful development of the south went on undisturbed. Britain became one of the chief granaries of the Empire, and the natives also produced building materials, pottery, glass, and metal-ware ; while the chief imports were luxuries of all sorts.

The Roman administration was centred in towns, connected with each other by roads which enabled it to dominate the countryside. There were six such centres in Britain : at St. Albans, Colchester, Silchester, York, Wroxeter, and Cirencester. London was already becoming an important commercial centre, owing to its situation at the point where the roads from the Continent crossed the Thames and radiated to east, north, and west ; but it was not yet the political capital. That position was occupied by York, where the Governor of the Province had his residence. The medicinal properties of the salt springs at Bath were discovered, and that city became a fashionable watering-place. Most people of importance had country houses

with farms tilled by slaves. In some respects these "villas," the remains of which can still be seen in many parts of the country, were more luxurious than any later dwellings up to half a century ago, for they were centrally heated and had elaborate vapour baths. There were also public baths in all towns and military stations.

The general system of government and taxation was uniform all over the Empire, but the Romans had no racial prejudices. Many administrative posts were filled by natives; and in the country districts the old Celtic clan-system survived under chieftains who acted as Imperial officials and were proud to wear the fringed toga which was the mark of Roman citizenship. Latin was the official language, much as English is in India today; but just as Indians continue to use their own languages, so did the Celts of Roman Britain. Indeed, the bulk of the population were never so completely Romanised as the Gauls were, the country being so much farther from the centre of civilisation.

The most important incident during these three centuries was the attempt of the Emperor *Severus* to conquer Scotland in the years 209-11. The expedition was planned on a very large scale and some remarkable feats of military engineering were performed in the course of it; but the Highlands were too wild to be held in force, and when Severus died in the course of the campaign, his son *Caracalla* gave up the attempt and hurried back to Rome to secure the succession.

### 10. *The Empire in Decline*

About A.D. 200 signs of weakness began to show themselves in the fabric of the Empire. The position of Emperor was not hereditary, and there were constant civil wars between rival candidates put forward by the legions stationed in different provinces. Moreover, as time went on Roman citizens became unwilling to lead the rough life of the soldier. The legions on the frontiers came to be recruited largely from barbarians, and sometimes whole tribes were taken into the imperial service under their own chieftains, who became "Roman generals." Indeed, this was often the only means of preventing them from raiding the interior.

The impulse of new races to move westwards, which had already sent several great waves of humanity migrating across Europe (§§ 3, 5), had threatened the power of Rome even in the days of the Republic. It had been kept in check by the military organisation of the Empire, but now that the Imperial system was weakening the barriers began to break down. One of the most vulnerable parts was the distant province of Britain. Some of the semi-savage Teutonic peoples who had pressed across Europe in the rear of the Celts had settled in northern Germany and Scandinavia. Here they learned to build ships in clumsy imitation of the Roman galleys, and began to make freebooting attacks on the British coasts. About A.D. 290 the Imperial Government had to appoint special officers, usually natives of these parts, to take command of coast defences, with the title of "Count of the Saxon Shore" (*i.e.* of the shore which the Saxons attacked).

Then, at the beginning of the following century, the Empire took a new lease of life. The administration was reorganised by two very able Emperors, Diocletian and Constantine. In each province the civil power was separated from the military command, and thus viceroys were no longer able to raise rebellions with soldiers at their backs. Constantine (who is said to have been born in Britain) shifted the seat of government from Rome to Byzantium, which he re-built and named after himself. He took this step partly that his headquarters might be close to the most threatened of the frontiers; but partly, also, that he might have a freer hand in establishing a new State religion—*Christianity*.

Jesus Christ was born during the reign of Augustus, the first of the emperors. The Gospel made slow progress at first, but during the second and third centuries it spread rapidly owing to the improved communications throughout the Roman world. It was a complete contrast to the prevailing paganism. Firstly, it was universal, whereas the pagan gods varied from place to place. Secondly, it taught men exactly what they ought to do and to believe. Thirdly, it had a complete system of philosophy, explaining man's nature and his destiny after this life. Fourthly, it was exclusive—it would not admit that there was any other road to salvation.

Educated Romans had almost ceased to have any real belief in their own polytheistic religion, and the government was in general very tolerant of local forms of worship ; but the outward observance of the official rites was part of the fabric of the State, and a religion which taught that it was sinful to worship the gods of Rome seemed to be dangerous to political stability. Several of the emperors, therefore, tried to put a stop to the movement by persecution, but Constantine realised not only that this policy was ineffective, but also that a universal creed like this might be useful as a binding force to hold the Empire together. He therefore adopted it as an official religion, and one of his reasons for moving to Constantinople was that Rome was too full of buildings associated with the old paganism to be a suitable capital for a Christian emperor.

The Empire afterwards split into two parts—the Western ruled from Rome and the Eastern from Constantinople. In this form it managed to hold its own until about 400, but then the barbarians began once more to swarm across the Rhine and the Danube. They had a great admiration for Roman civilisation, and many tribes had adopted a form of Christianity, but they had long cast covetous eyes on the rich and ill-protected lands of the Roman provinces, and they were now set in commotion by new hordes of invaders from the East—the ferocious Huns. In the course of the first half of the fifth century the various Teutonic races which had hitherto dwelt between Rhine, Danube, and Don made themselves masters of all the Western Empire—the Visigoths in Spain, the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Franks in northern France, and the Burgundians in southern.

Naturally, Britain was the first province to be abandoned in the struggle of the Imperial Government for existence. In 410, when Alaric the Goth was hammering at the gates of Rome itself, the last of the legions stationed in Britain was withdrawn, and a new epoch in our history began.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *What were the effects on Britain of the Roman Occupation ?*
- (2) *Describe the various stages in the Roman Conquest and Occupation.*

## CHAPTER III

### The Nordic Migration

(400-600)

*The Roman civilisation was destroyed by the Nordic invaders in Britain far more completely than on the Continent. Consequently, the next two hundred years of our history is almost a blank. It was not until the year 597 that the country was again brought into contact with the rest of Europe, through the agency of a mission from the Catholic Church, which had inherited something of the authority of the defunct Empire.*

#### II. *The End of Roman Britain*

The Nordic invasions were far more destructive in Britain than in any other part of the Empire. Most of the races which swarmed across the Imperial frontiers into the Continental provinces had long been in close contact with the Empire; some, indeed, were in the Imperial service and professed the Christian religion. They destroyed much of the Roman civilisation, but they also spared much of it. They adopted the local forms of spoken Latin, albeit with an admixture of their own tongues; and they prided themselves on maintaining much of the machinery of Roman administration, though this, too, was modified by their own tribal customs, especially by their tendency to local independence.

The invaders of Britain, on the other hand, were wild and ferocious peoples who came from homes situated far away from the frontiers; they hated and scorned the civilised life of the Empire, and they took a savage joy in destroying every vestige of it. Nor were these the only enemies now attacking Britain

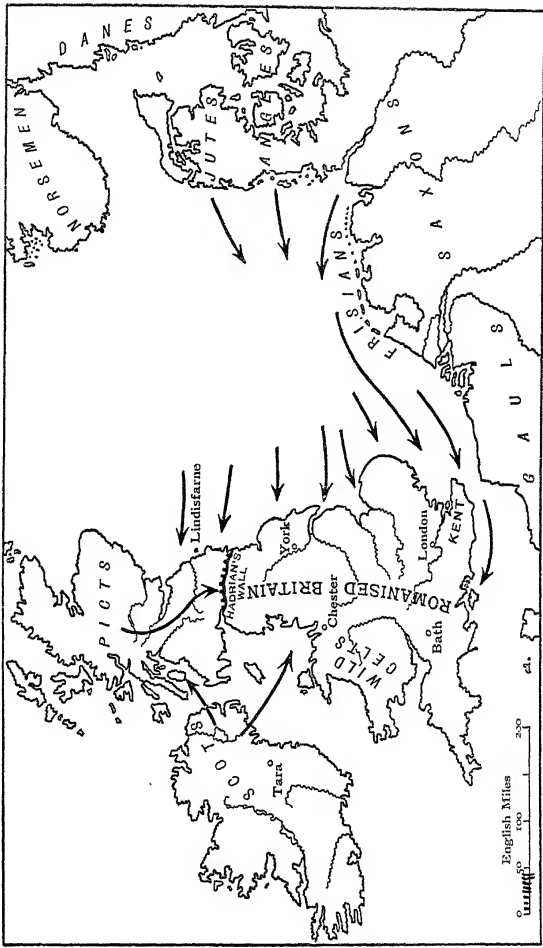
—the province was also subject to raids by the Goidelic Celts who had thrust back ages before into Scotland and Ireland (§ 5). These people, known as Picts and Scots respectively, had never been subdued by the Romans, and they remained as primitive as when they first landed in Britain a thousand years before. The Picts had several times burst through the defences of Hadrian's Wall, and the Scots had swarmed over the Irish Sea to sweep across the adjacent parts of the province with fire and slaughter. Thus, when the Nordic attacks on east and south became bolder and more frequent in the latter part of the fourth century, the Roman officials, many of them native-born, were sorely hampered by attacks from north and west as well. At the same time, the Imperial Government at Rome gave them less and less support; for this, the remotest of its provinces, was naturally the first which it had to abandon.

The consequence was that Romano-British civilisation almost disappeared from the face of the land. It is as if a thick curtain had descended round our coasts. Behind that curtain there was going on a process which was of vital importance for the future of our race—the fusion of the Celtic element with the Nordic in our blood; yet of this process we know little or nothing. One thing is clear, however: that for centuries after a new form of Christian civilisation had begun to take shape on the mainland of Western Europe, Britain was in the hands of heathen savages. And this fact was not without influence on our national character; for these barbarians had certain rugged virtues of their own, which to some extent we have inherited. They believed their chiefs to be descended from heroic gods who once dwelt on earth; they glorified health and strength, loyalty to plighted word, carelessness of wounds and death; they enjoyed the simple things of life—eating and drinking, physical activity, adventure and fighting.

### 12. *Behind the Curtain*

It has sometimes been supposed that the Britons had become so slack during the four centuries that they were protected by the Roman legions that they were defenceless against the Nordic invaders; but this is by no means true. There was no

# THE DESTRUCTION OF ROMAN BRITAIN





lack in warlike spirit amongst them—the garrison had long consisted almost entirely of men of British birth. The trouble was that the Romans had made soldiering the business of specialists, and when these were withdrawn the officials had no time to organise fresh forces. Yet, in spite of this drawback, in no part of the Empire was such a stout resistance offered to the invading hordes. Indeed, this may be one reason for the wholesale destruction of the Britons, in contrast to the acquiescent Gauls and Spaniards and Italians, who saved not only their own lives but much of their property, and gained in the end a profound influence over the invaders. In Britain, on the other hand, the Celtic population was almost entirely exterminated in some districts, while over most of the country the only survivors were people of humble rank who became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the conquerors.

As to the details of the conquest the only contemporary whose evidence has come down to us was a British monk named Gildas, who wrote a tearful but incoherent lamentation over the destruction that was wrought. The first reliable writer on the subject was the Venerable Bede, the earliest of English historians, who wrote two centuries later; and even he only gives a general account of the origin of the invading races. He tells us that “the immigrants came from those very powerful nations—Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent and of the Isle of Wight. . . . The Saxons came from the land we now call Old Saxony (*i.e.* just south of the “neck” of Denmark). From the Angles—that is, from the region now called Angulus, which is said to have remained from that day till now depopulated, lying between the boundaries of the Jutes and the Saxons—came the East Angles, the Mercians, and all the race of Northumbrians.”

Beyond these somewhat threadbare statements we have to rely on indirect evidence. The first stages of the conquest seem to have consisted of mere plundering raids carried out by individual adventurers and their personal followers. They sailed up some inlet, landed, attacked the nearest settlement or villa, pillaged it, burnt it, and then departed with their booty across the North Sea. Sometimes they organised invasions on a large scale by a number of leaders joining forces under the

temporary command of a generalissimo. One of these expeditions swept right across the midlands, ravaged Somerset, Gloucester, and the Welsh borders, and then retired to the east coast, leaving blackened ruins behind them.

Then followed the stage of permanent settlement. There has always been a tradition that this began when a British chieftain named Vortigern (the old tribal system having grown up again after the decay of the Roman administration) followed the practice of the later Empire by taking two of the Germanic leaders into his service to defend him from the others, and that disputes having broken out as to payment these mercenaries seized land in the neighbourhood for themselves. Whatever the truth of this may be, it would obviously not be long before the raiders would begin to think of settling down for good in a country which was so pleasant and well-wooded and fruitful when compared with their own rather bleak and inhospitable homes across the sea. Then they would bring over their wives and families; and one cannot help admiring the courage of the women who set out in those unseaworthy craft to brave the terrors of the deep and of an unknown country. This, indeed, is one of the advantages that Britain has enjoyed in being an island; none but the boldest and hardiest people came to it as immigrants to form the basis of its population.

Their shallow boats would sail far up the rivers and they would settle wherever they spied a likely spot, after killing or enslaving or driving off any natives who might be living in the neighbourhood. It is noteworthy that to this day no English river is a county-boundary except the Thames. This suggests that successive bands from the same tribe settled near each other on river-banks, but that the navigation of the Thames was barred by London, which remained a Romano-British stronghold long after the country at large was in the hands of the conquerors.

In the first decades of the long struggle the superior weapons of the natives gave them a considerable advantage over the barbarians with their rough spears and wooden shields. At least once they won a great victory at a place called Mount Badon, the exact situation of which nobody knows. It was not until the invaders had won pitched battles at *Deorham* (571) in Somerset and at *Chester* (613) that they managed to subdue

the west country, and even then they hardly attempted to conquer Wales or Cornwall. It is highly probable that the legends of Arthur and his Round Table were based on the struggles of the Christian Celts against the rising tide of heathen barbarism ; and it may well have been at Deorham that " all day long the noise of battle rolled among the mountains by the winter sea."

### 13. *Celtic Christianity*

Among the features of Roman civilisation which were swept away was the British Church. Christianity had made a certain amount of headway here long before the days of the Emperor Constantine ; and during one of the persecutions a famous British martyr, St. Alban, had suffered death for his faith at the hands of the Romans. Yet even when it was adopted as the official religion it never became so firmly established as elsewhere in the Empire. We hear vaguely of British bishops attending congresses on the Continent, but amongst the numerous Roman remains which are constantly being unearthed we find very few traces of church buildings.

Whatever the position of the faith in the later days of the occupation, the Anglo-Saxon incursions destroyed it altogether over most of the country. But a certain proportion of the population succeeded in escaping westwards before the advancing tide of conquest ; and the people best able to do this would naturally be the well-to-do merchants and officials—precisely the class among whom Christianity had been most widely adopted. Henceforth they would cling to their faith the more fervently from the fact that it differentiated them from the uncouth savages who had driven them from their homes ; and place-names in Wales and Cornwall bear witness to the many forgotten saints who lived there during the next few centuries.

These people felt too much hatred and contempt for their conquerors to make any attempt to convert them ; but some of them founded in Ireland the remarkable religious movement which we know as *Celtic Christianity*. The most famous of the Romano-British missionaries in Ireland was *St. Patrick*. The Church he founded there had no organisation of parish

priests under the authority of bishops. The religious life was carried on by devotees who attached themselves to some holy man and lived in groups of huts built in a lonely spot, often near the sea. Thence they went forth from time to time to preach and baptise, returning after each journey to their headquarters for prayer and study. This primitive form of monastic life was the most characteristic feature of Celtic Christianity. In the course of time it spread from Ireland to Scotland. About the year 550 an Irish monk, *St. Columba*, migrated to the island of Iona, and established there a monastery from which he and his followers and successors converted the Pictish Highlanders and the Scots who now inhabited the Lowlands.

#### 14. *Growth of the Catholic Church*

Meanwhile, remarkable developments were taking place in the organisation of Christian worship on the Continent. The period that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire is sometimes called *The Dark Ages*. The orderly and cultured life to which people had been accustomed under the Empire had been broken up. In the chaos of warring tribes and rival chieftains the only refuge for earnest Christians was in the seclusion of monastic life. The great leader in this movement was *St. Benedict* (460-543). Dissatisfied with the lax discipline of existing monasteries, he founded near Naples an institution with much stricter rules, which became the model for others all over Europe. The Benedictine monks not only performed religious exercises, such as praying and fasting, but they also spent some part of each day in useful labour—husbandry, building, teaching, or the copying of manuscripts; and they had to live permanently within the walls of their convent. It was most important for the development of European civilisation that mental activity was thus kept alive all through the following centuries, when the outside world was so full of strife and violence.

Even more momentous was the growth at about the same epoch of the power of the Papacy. In the early days of Christianity, churches had grown up all over the Roman world, those of each district being under the general supervision of a bishop chosen by themselves. While the Empire lasted these bishops

had been practically independent of each other, but in the chaos of the fifth century men felt the necessity for some sort of central authority to hold these churches together. The Goths had so completely established themselves in Italy that no more "Emperors of the West" were chosen after 473; but there was an instinctive feeling that power must be centred in "the Eternal City" which had ruled the world for so many centuries. Thus, by 600, the Bishops of Rome had made good their claim to be the "Popes," or spiritual fathers, to all peoples in Western Europe.\*

This development was mainly the work of *Gregory the Great*, a Benedictine monk of noble character and remarkable ability. He was appointed to the See of Rome in 590, and by the time he died in 604 it was already becoming the heir to the majesty and authority of the Roman Empire. The Nordic peoples who had destroyed that Empire had not intended to do so. They longed in a dim, sub-conscious way for some universal power that would give hope of order and progress in the chaos they had created; and the only institution which could do this henceforth was the Catholic (*i.e.* universal) Church.

Pope Gregory the Great is specially important for English history, because it was he who brought our ancestors back into touch with the civilisation of Europe. In the earlier part of his career he had planned to go himself to save the benighted islanders whom an untoward fate had cut off from Christendom. When he became Pope he had to abandon the project so far as he himself was concerned, but he sent a party of missionaries under the leadership of a Frankish monk named *Augustine* to undertake the sacred task.

### 15. *Anglo-Saxon Christianity*

Wherever parties of invaders settled in England the chieftains under whose command they came retained authority over them. Almost from the first these leaders began to struggle with each other for supremacy, and by about 600 the whole of the southern,

\* Those of South-eastern Europe remained under the authority of the "Emperors of the East" at Constantinople and the "Patriarchs" appointed by them. This was the origin of the "Greek Orthodox Church" which still flourishes in those parts.

eastern, and midland parts of the country were a congeries of petty "kingdoms," fluctuating in size and shape almost from year to year. The most important of them, and the most advanced in civilisation, was Kent; and it was in Thanet that the missionaries from Rome landed towards the end of the year 597. With that event the light of history begins to fall upon our island again, after two centuries of darkness.

At first the mission was entirely successful. Men of rank among the Anglo-Saxons had long lost any real belief in their legendary hero-gods, Thor and Woden, and had begun to feel that they were behind the times compared with the people across the Channel. Ethelbert, King of Kent, had a Frankish wife who was already a Christian. He welcomed Augustine, and at Whitsuntide in the following year he and his chief nobles were baptised. He built a church at Canterbury, which has ever since been the ecclesiastical capital of England.

When the missionaries went on to preach the Gospel outside Kent, however, their task became more difficult. The farther they got from the coast the less the old traditions had been disturbed by contact with the Continent. The Nordic paganism had no priesthood and enforced no morality; and to the more primitive Anglo-Saxons much of the new doctrine seemed very strange and far-fetched—the duty of humility, for instance, and self-denial, and loving one's enemies. Augustine and his successors met with little further success, and their only noteworthy achievement during the next half-century was the mission of *Paulinus* to Northumbria, which had by this time become the most powerful of the kingdoms. The king there was Edwin, who founded "Edwin's burgh" to mark the northern limit of his dominions. Like the King of Kent, Edwin had a Christian Queen, and his conversion was followed by that of his chief men. But all the ground thus gained was lost in 633 when Edwin was defeated and killed at *Heathfield* by Penda, King of Mercia. Although Penda, whose dominions lay in the midlands, was a rugged old heathen, he was no persecutor of religion, and was allied with the Christian Welsh. Yet the result of his victory was a period of bloodshed and confusion in the course of which the Catholic Church was wiped out of existence except in Kent. Then the new King of Northumbria, Oswald, who had become a

convert to Celtic Christianity while an exile in Scotland, sent to Iona for a missionary to re-convert his subjects. *St. Aidan* came and established a monastery on Holy Island, whence he and his monks went on preaching tours over the north and midlands.

Thus, when the Roman evangelists began once more to work their way from Kent through East Anglia and Mercia they came up against a new difficulty—the hostility of rival missionaries. The Celtic monks had been so long cut off from the rest of Europe by the belt of heathenism across England that they knew nothing of the developments by which the Pope had become the acknowledged head of western Christendom; and they resisted his claim to dictate to them what they should believe and how they should conduct their services. Disputes broke out about such details as to the date of Easter and whether priests ought to shave the front or the crown of their heads; but the differences really lay deeper—they really lay in the contrast between Roman strictness and the Celtic laxity in organisation. In 664 King Oswy of Northumbria summoned a meeting at Whitby of the chief men of both Churches to settle the matter. The “Synod of Whitby” decided in favour of the Papal party—largely, it is said, through the influence of the King himself, who was impressed by the Pope’s claim to hold the keys of heaven and hell. The Celtic Church continued its separate existence for a time, but gradually died out.

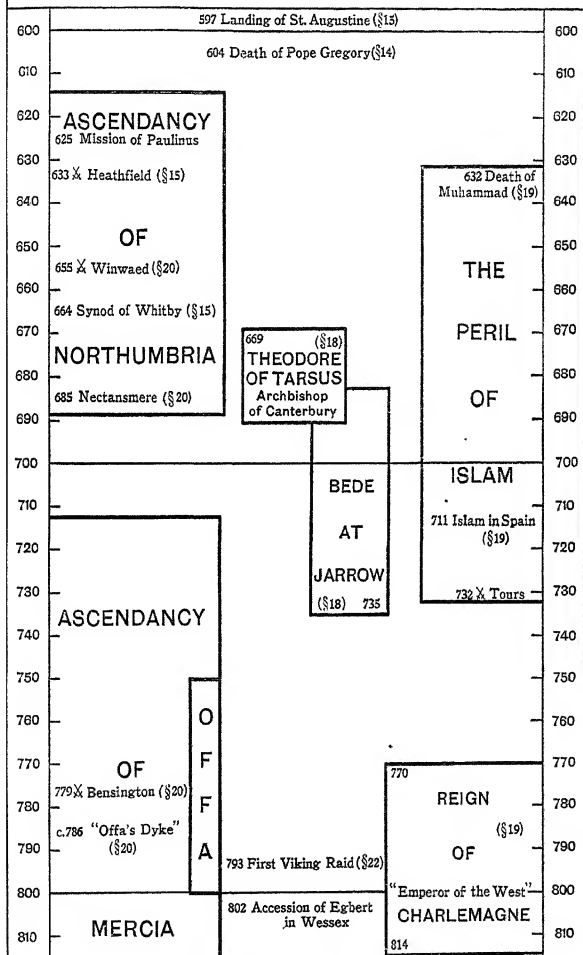
The decision at Whitby had momentous consequences, for by bringing England into direct relationship with the Catholic Church it placed her in contact with European civilisation. And whereas the Celtic Christianity confined itself to inculcating personal piety and brotherly love, the Catholic Church bred a class of worldly wise and cultured priests imbued with Roman ideals of orderly government, who played a most influential part in the political life of Europe in the centuries to come.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *How, why, and with what consequences did the Nordic Conquest of Britain differ from the corresponding movement on the Continent?*

(2) *Trace the Conversion of Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity.*

# THE HEPTARCHY





## CHAPTER IV

### England under "The Heptarchy"

(600-830)

*Historians used to speak of early Anglo-Saxon England as being a "heptarchy," the seven kingdoms being Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Wessex. It is doubtful if there ever was a time when the country was so clearly and definitely divided. But it is clear that the tendency in the incessant strife was for strong kings to become stronger; and in this chapter we shall see how this process led to Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex in turn gaining predominance over all the others. We shall also get a glimpse of the social and political conditions in that very "Old England."*

#### 16. "Eorls" and "Ceorls"

We saw in the last chapter that the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in 597 brought the country once more into touch with European civilisation; but the material for the student of history continues to be very scanty for another two hundred years and more. Our chief sources of information as to social conditions during those centuries are several old Codes of Laws which have been preserved. One of these was drawn up by Ethelbert of Kent (§ 15) a few years after his conversion. It indicates that there were three distinct ranks, for it prescribes different "wergilds" (fines for murder) for killing "eorls," "ceorls," and "laets" respectively. The first-named were nobly-born; it was much more expensive to kill one of these than it was to kill a plain "ceorl" or freeman; while the "laet" or serf could be murdered quite cheaply. We know that such differences

in inherited rank had long existed among the Germanic peoples for Tacitus, a Roman historian of the second century, mentions the fact in his description of "Germania"; but in other parts of Western Europe nobility by birth had died out as a result of the migration and had given place to nobility by service—*i.e.* rank began to be the result of the personal favour of the leader who parcelled out the conquered lands among his followers. Why did this not happen in England? Probably because the leaders of invading war bands, finding their numbers too few to occupy the lands they had won, sent back to induce other "eorls" of the same tribe to migrate, promising them full recognition of their rank. It is evident that many spots were settled by good-sized parties of blood-relatives; for this is the origin of such place-names as Tooting, Basingstoke, Woking, and Buckingham, which are based on Anglo-Saxon family names.

The provisions of the Code which Ine, King of Wessex, issued about a hundred years later, imply a very different social system. In this Code the distinction in "wergild" is between the man who fights for the king—a "gesith" or "thegn"—and the man who does not occupy this privileged position. The greater importance of the former is shown not merely in his higher "wergild," but also in the heavy fine which he has himself to pay if he fails to render due military service to the King when called upon to do so.

There is another interesting point about Ine's Code: it does not mention "laets," but calls the lowest class "Wealhs"—*i.e.* Welshmen. This suggests that in Wessex, at any rate, many of the old Celtic race must have survived—doubtless for the most part descendants of the farm slaves of Roman times.

These social distinctions—between nobles who fight for the king, freemen who till their own land, and serfs who till the land of nobles in return for subsistence—form the basis of the judicial system. In their primitive law-courts there was no thought of hearing and weighing evidence. An accused person brought men to the court to swear as to his character, and the value of an individual's oath depended on the number of "hides" \* of land he possessed. Thus, a man accused of highway robbery

\* A "hide" of land was the amount estimated in each particular district as sufficient to support a man and an average sized family.

for instance, could only get off by producing "compurgators" to the global value of 120 hides.

As the petty kingdoms grew larger their system of government became more elaborate. Villages were grouped in "hundreds" and sent representatives to periodical "hundred-moots" at which matters of common interest were arranged and disputes between districts adjusted; and the "hundreds" were similarly grouped in "shires," the "shire-moots" being presided over by a great noble who bore the title of "Ealdorman."

The preamble to Ine's Code mentions that it has been drawn up by the King "with the advice and counsel of Medde my bishop, and of Eorcenwald my bishop, with all my ealdormen and the most distinguished wise men of my people, and also of a large assembly of God's servants." Such a gathering was known as a "Witanagemot." We may perhaps see in it the germ of the modern Parliament; but there was nothing representative about it. The members were nominated by the King, and they met only on special occasions. One of their most notable duties was when the King died to nominate a successor from among the members of his family; for the right of primogeniture—the succession of the eldest—was not yet generally recognised.

### 17. *Rural Life*

The Roman civilisation had been a town civilisation with country villas for the well-to-do; but the Anglo-Saxons only felt happy in the countryside. They let the deserted Roman towns fall into ruin, and built themselves rude houses and barns of split logs such as they had been accustomed to in their ancestral homes across the water. They often tilled the farm-lands round the villas, and they sometimes used the bricks and stones of the Roman buildings for their churches, but they never lived in the villas themselves.

The central figure in most of their little village communities was a local magnate—often a "thegn," who lived in a big "hall"—built at first of timber like the humbler dwellings of the village. He exercised a sort of paternal authority over the local village life, and his lands were tilled for him by "thralls" or bondmen.

The agricultural methods of the Anglo-Saxons had been handed down from father to son for ages and were primitive in the extreme. Wheat or rye for bread, barley for beer—these were their main crops. The one principle of scientific husbandry which they had mastered was that no field should be put under the same crop for two years in succession. They divided the arable land of the village into three parts, one for wheat or rye, one for barley, while the third lay fallow, and they changed the purpose to which each field was put at the end of every year. Obviously, every member of the village community would have to have a holding in each of the three fields ; otherwise he and his family would have food without drink one year (which would be bad), and drink without food the next (which would be worse), while in the third year they would get nothing at all. And as the land would not be of uniform quality all over these great fields it was only fair that the holding of each villager should include strips in different parts of it. These strips were usually long and narrow, for convenience in ploughing, and were separated from each other by grass edges called "balks."

There was no room for enterprise or originality in this method of farming. The rotation of crops was fixed by custom, and even the operation of ploughing had to be carried out by common consent ; for the clumsy ploughs of those days (with shares of wood tipped with iron) required six or eight oxen to draw them, and few individuals owned more than one or two of these beasts. There must have been plenty of quarrelling ; but the work had to be done, and tradition had fixed the routine of seasonal tasks—spring ploughing for barley, haymaking on the meadowland in the surrounding neighbourhood, then harvesting the corn (by hand, of course), then autumn ploughing for the wheat crop, which was always sown in the winter.

People ate little meat except the flesh of the pigs which scratched a living on waste and in woodland. Their cattle and sheep were undersized and scraggy, and their chief vegetables were beans and peas. The commonest drink for all meals was thin, home-brewed beer, with mead made from fermented honey for the well-to-do ; and these ancestors of ours always had a reputation for drinking more than was good for them.

Unless the village happened to be near one of the Roman

roads, communication with the outside world was very difficult, and the inhabitants had to supply themselves with all their needs. For clothing, leather played a great part, and rough fabrics woven from home-spun wool by firelight during the long winter evenings when outdoor occupations were impossible. But these folk were not tempted to keep late hours, for (apart from the flickering wood-fire) their only artificial light was made from rushes dipped in tallow, which must have given out more smell than light. They hardly ever saw money; but they had no need of it, since there was nothing to buy. The only specialist in the village was the smith who made and repaired tools and weapons, and he was paid for his labour "in kind."

We see here the foundations of English country life—the life lived by the vast majority of Englishmen for century after century, right down to the time of the Georges. It is only during the last 150 years that capitalist farming, the invention of machinery, and increased facilities for transport have broken up the traditional secluded village life of Old England.

### 18. *The Great Archbishop Theodore*

The importance of the victory of the Roman Church at Whitby was seen a few years later when the Pope sent *Theodore of Tarsus* to be Archbishop of Canterbury (669); for only in a far-flung and truly Catholic Church would it have been possible to choose a Greek monk from Asia Minor to be Primate of the Church in England. And amply did Theodore justify his appointment—indeed, he was one of the ablest men who ever occupied the See. Down to his time each of the petty English kingdoms had possessed its own bishop, more or less independent of all other bishops and combining the position of a Court Chaplain with that of an overseer of the clergy. Most of the religious life of the country was shut up within the walls of monasteries, and parish priests were few and far between. Theodore laid the foundations of an orderly system of bishoprics and parishes all over the country. When he divided over-large dioceses he met with much opposition from existing bishops who refused to recognise his authority; but by tact and persistence he overcame all these difficulties. He was over sixty years of

age when he first came to England, but he was a man of great vitality, and before he died, some twenty years later, he had infused the Anglo-Saxon clergy with a new spirit. Many villages were now provided with their own priests, endowed by the local magnates with glebe-land and supported by tithes levied on the produce of the inhabitants. At first most of the churches were built of timber; but as time went on these were replaced by stone buildings, and many of the village churches of to-day stand on the sites of Saxon predecessors.

There was no clear distinction between Church and State in those days. Bishops sat in the shire courts alongside the ealdormen, and enforced the Church laws with their aid. We can judge the growing influence of the clergy by the heavy "wergilds" exacted for injury to priests and the severe penalties inflicted on those who failed in the punctual payment of Church dues. It was, therefore, an important factor in the development of the nation that from Theodore's time all the bishops recognised the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and attended his synods; for these were the only gatherings of representative men from all parts of the country, and this ecclesiastical unity paved the way for political unity later on.

Nor was the debt of the English Church to Theodore limited to matters of organisation. He was a distinguished scholar, and he set the study of Greek and Latin on such a firm basis that for a century and more England was in the forefront of European culture. Greek was studied at Canterbury when it was almost unknown elsewhere in Western Europe. In the monastery of Jarrow the *Venerable Bede* presided over the study of 300 monks, and produced the finest historical work of the Dark Ages, the "Ecclesiastical History of the English People," in which he describes the struggle between Celtic and Latin Churches. His works were widely studied on the Continent, and he set the fashion of counting dates from the birth of Christ. Moreover, when a hundred years after Theodore's death the great Emperor Charlemagne sought to make his court the centre of civilisation, he turned to an Englishman, Alcuin, for advice and assistance. Nor must we overlook the fact that it was the English Church of Theodore's own day that produced St. Boniface, a Devon man who went as missionary to southern Germany and

organised the Church there under the immediate authority of the Pope.

### 19. *Muhammad and Charlemagne*

Let us now turn for a moment from these insular matters to some contemporary foreign events of profound importance to the development of western civilisation in general.

About A.D. 600 there arose in Arabia a great religious teacher named Muhammad. He denounced idolatry and taught that there was one God, the unseen Father of all, who had sent three great prophets for the instruction of mankind—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad himself. By the time of his death in 632 his gospel had made many converts, not only among the Arabs, but also among the Eastern Christians, who were puzzled by such complicated doctrines as the Trinity, and were distracted by the constant dissensions within the Church. For Muhammad's teaching was attractively simple and direct: all men were equal in the sight of God, both in this world and the next; and there was no room for saints or priests or sacraments or symbols or mysteries in it.

Muhammadanism stimulated the Arabs into becoming a great warrior race, inspired by a furious zeal to convert all mankind to what they believed to be the only true faith. The Caliphs (*i.e.* successors) of the Prophet made use of this irresistible enthusiasm to conquer Syria, Persia, Turkestan, Egypt, and Northern Africa. In 710 they passed over the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain; and within another two years they had not only subdued most of the Iberian peninsula but were making their way across the Pyrenees. It must not be supposed that they were mere barbarians; on the contrary, by our modern standards they were far more cultured than the Christian peoples of Europe. The new faith had produced as magical an effect on their minds as on their fighting spirit. They absorbed and developed Greek philosophy, they made great strides in science and mathematics and the fine arts at a time when Europe was weltering in the chaos of the Dark Ages. It seemed for a time as if Christianity itself might be wiped out, for the conquering hosts won their way right into the heart of France. Then the tide turned, however. The Franks, a confederation of Teutonic

peoples who had crossed the Rhine and settled in Gaul at about the same time as the Anglo-Saxons had come to Britain, were now established as the ruling race from the Elbe to the Atlantic. Their kings were a weak-minded race, the Merovingians, and the real authority had fallen into the hands of a succession of chief ministers called "Mayors of the Palace." At this critical time this position was held by an able soldier named Charles Martel, who gathered a great army of chieftains to meet the Islamic peril. After the mighty seven-days' *Battle of Tours* (732) the invaders were defeated and driven back into Spain, and Europe was saved for Christianity.

This Charles Martel's grandson became king of the Franks in his own right. He was one of the most famous monarchs in European history. In later ages he was always spoken of as "Charlemagne"—"Charles the Great"; but despite this French-looking name he was purely German in blood and speech. Like the successors of Muhammad, he made religion a pretext for wars of aggression, converting whole nations in northern and central Germany to Christianity by the powerful arguments of fire and sword. Conquests in Italy led him to adopt the idea of reviving the universal monarchy of the Roman Empire in a sort of partnership with the Pope, who was the head of the universal Church. On Christmas Day, 800, the Pope crowned him Emperor of the West in the Church of St. Peter at Rome. This attempted revival of the *Pax Romana* did not long survive his death in 814, for his widespread dominions once more became the prey of warring claimants, but the ideal lived on in men's minds and bore fruit at a later date, as we shall see.

### 20. *Offa and Egbert*

Milton called the struggles between the kings of the so-called Heptarchy "battles of kites and crows," and we should have a bewildering and thankless task if we tried to follow their fluctuating fortunes. Suffice it to say that three of the monarchies in turn enjoyed a recognised supremacy over the others each holding its hegemony for about a hundred years.

During the seventh century (600–700) this position was held by *Northumbria*, which was gradually enlarged by victories

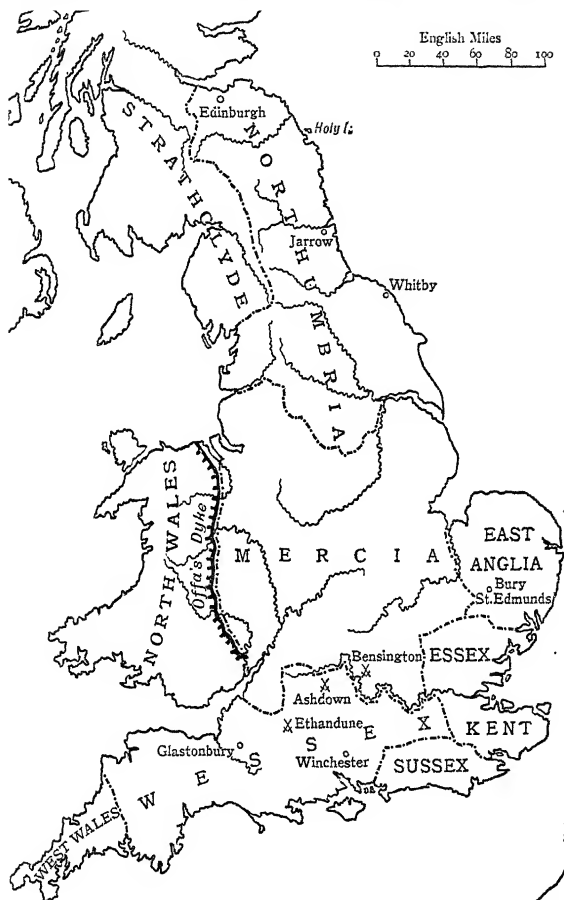


over the Picts and Welsh until it included all the land between the River Trent and the Firth of Forth. We have already become acquainted with two of the most famous of Northumbrian kings—Edwin, the convert of Paulinus, and Oswy, the convener of the Synod of Whitby (§ 15). Two years before that synod met, Oswy had avenged the overthrow of Edwin by defeating and slaying his conqueror, Penda, King of the Mercians, at the great battle of *Winwaed*. In 685, however, Oswy's son and successor fell in a great conflict with the Picts at *Nectansmere*; and the kingdom of Northumbria never recovered from the blow to its power and prestige. We always associate it with intellectual rather than political achievements—with the mission of St. Aidan, with the religious poems of Caedmon (§ 40), and with the writings of the Venerable Bede.

The next century was the age of *Mercian* supremacy, which culminated in the reign of *King Offa* (757–796). Offa was the first English king to be treated as an equal by Continental rulers. He subjugated Essex, Kent, and East Anglia in turn, reducing their rulers to the position of sub-kings or ealdormen; he crushed the turbulent Welsh and made the long turf wall known as "Offa's Dyke" from Chester to Chepstow—more, presumably, to mark a definite boundary than as a defensive bastion; and he overcame the rising kingdom of Wessex in the famous battle of *Bensington*, near Oxford. Thenceforward he could claim to be the ruler of all England south of the Humber. He was a statesman as well as a warrior and a devoted son of the Church. It was to him that Charlemagne applied for the services of Alcuin, and he went on a pilgrimage to Rome when already a reigning king.

The glory of Mercia did not long survive the death of Offa. The Witan of *Wessex* had just chosen as king a particularly able member of their royal house named *Egbert*, who was destined to gain a more definite supremacy over the other kingdoms than Offa had ever achieved. He had spent some years in exile, and during his residence abroad he had learnt much of the arts of government at the court of the great Charlemagne. During the first part of his reign he contented himself with consolidating the government of Wessex itself; but a wanton attack by an ambitious Mercian ealdorman gave him an oppor-

# ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY



tunity of expansion. At the great battle of *Ellandune* (825) he inflicted a severe defeat on the Mercians; several of the sub-kings hitherto under Mercian domination hastened to accept his overlordship. Mercia itself was in no position to offer prolonged resistance, and when Egbert advanced across the Trent the King of Northumbria anticipated invasion by meeting him half-way with offers of submission. Egbert's triumph was now complete, and for the last few years of his reign the supremacy of Wessex was undisputed.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *Write an ecclesiastical history of England from the coming of Augustine to the death of Theodore.*

(2) *What was the importance in English history of the following events: (a) The appointment of Theodore; (b) The Battle of Tours; (c) The Synod of Whitby; (d) The Battle of Nectansmere?*

# THE ASCENDANCY OF WESSEX

810		802		810
				Death of Charlemagne 814
820		EGBERT		820
	✕ Ellandune (§20)			
830				830
840		839		840
		839		
850		ETHELWULF		850
		858		
860	DANISH RAIDS (§22-23)	ETHELBALD		860
		860		
		ETHELBERT		
		866		
870	✕ Ashdown 871 (§23)	ETHELRED I.		870
		871		
880	✕ Ethandune Pact of Chippenham } 878 (§24)			880
	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle commenced (§24)	ALFRED		
890				890
900		900		900
		900		
910		EDWARD THE ELDER		910
				Foundation of Normandy (§27)
920	Reconquest of Danelaw (§25)	924		920

## CHAPTER V

### The Danes

*England was now attacked by another Nordic race from over the North Sea, which eventually made good its hold over the country from the Tees to the Thames. The hero of the struggle which preceded this settlement was the noblest personality amongst all our kings ; and he and his son succeeded in welding this new element into the nation by a combination of military ability and statesmanlike wisdom.*

#### 21. *The Coming of the Norsemen*

Towards the end of the eighth century a new thrust of the Nordic race into civilised Europe began. This time it came from Scandinavia—the countries we now call Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. These folk were racially akin to the Germanic tribes which had broken down the Roman Empire some four hundred years before. The latter had long since become fused with the Romano-Celtic natives, and had come to feel themselves the heirs of Roman civilisation, but in this process the Scandinavian peoples had played no part. Down to about the year 800 they continued to live on in their northern homes, outside the range of these migrations, conquests, and spiritual developments. They retained many of the virtues of “the noble savage.” They were still pagans ; but they were not much interested in questions of religion and morality. They enjoyed eating and drinking and fighting, and had little regard for the sanctity of human life. They prided themselves on their scarlet cloaks, their golden bracelets and brooches, their long, fair hair and mighty stature, their prowess with broadsword and war-axe. In all these respects they resembled their Germanic kinsmen before the great irruption ; but they had one notable characteristic of their own. The Germanic peoples were essentially landmen. True, they had taken to the sea for the purpose of plundering Britain

and then migrating thither ; but, the conquest once completed, their taste for maritime adventure evaporated. To the Norsemen, on the other hand, the sea was always a chief means of communication and a regular source of food. Geographical circumstances made it so, for Denmark is a land of sandy flats intersected by tidal channels, while Norway consists of a wide mountain-range covered with snow-field and pine forest, leaving only narrow strips along the fiords for human habitation. Thus, the Norsemen acquired a skill and boldness as sailors which has never been surpassed at any place or time.

What made these people, who had hitherto fought and fished and farmed and traded amongst themselves, suddenly begin to go forth to conquer and loot the outside world ? Nobody knows. Possibly a bad harvest, possibly the disturbance caused by the influx of refugees from Charlemagne's Saxon campaigns. However the impulse came, it found many ready to act upon it ; for the fact that the chief men often married several wives meant that there were numbers of high-spirited youths about who could find little occupation in their restricted homeland and were delighted at the chance to seek their fortunes overseas.

## 22. *The Vikings in Action*

Their first experiments in piracy seem to have been made in the Orkneys and down the west coast of Scotland. A year or two later a more adventurous band pushed on farther and seized the Isle of Man as a base for raids on the surrounding coasts. Monasteries were a particularly tempting prey, for they were usually built near the sea, they were quite undefended, and many of them contained wealth accumulated from the gifts of generations of kings and nobles. The great foundation of St. Columba on Iona was demolished ; so was that of St. Patrick near Dublin ; and these repeated attacks destroyed almost completely the old Celtic Church which had flourished for centuries in Ireland and the Hebrides.

When the first parties returned home with wondrous tales of their adventures and exploits, and displayed their spoils to their admiring friends (male and female), the news quickly spread. The young men of the Scandinavian coasts began to

make these trips (combining pleasure with profit) the regular occupation of the summer months. Enterprising leaders were able to collect ever larger bands of companions and to push ever farther afield. As time went on they ceased to confine themselves to the coasts of Britain or to the summer of a single year. One bold party landed at the head of the Gulf of Finland, tramped across to the upper waters of the Dnieper, made themselves new ships there, sailed down and sacked Kiev, and then on into the Black Sea. There they met men of their own race who had come *via* the Bay of Biscay, the Straits of Gibraltar, and the Mediterranean. (It is said that a quarrel which had broken out among them some years before in Dublin was eventually fought out in the streets of Constantinople !) Others again sailed north-westward, colonised Iceland and Greenland, coasted along Labrador, and even gained a temporary foothold on the mainland of North America.

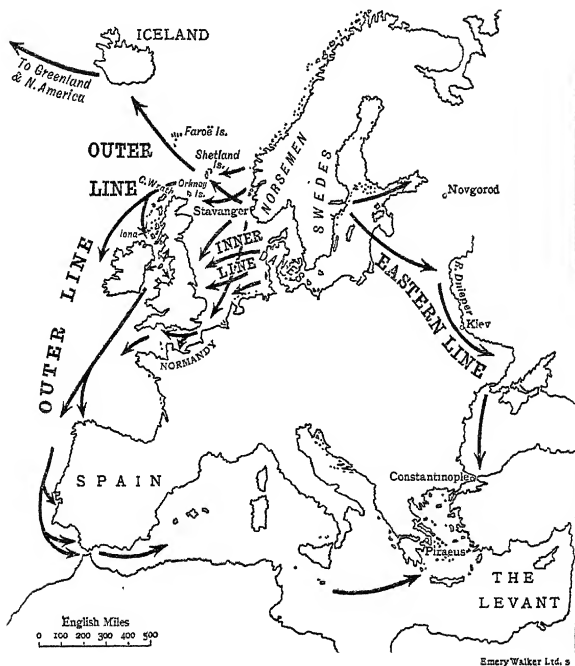
When we consider the type of ship the Vikings used we are amazed at their hardihood. Their vessels were long, narrow, and undecked, with a low freeboard except at bows and stern. They were propelled chiefly by oars, but were provided with a mast and a square sail (often striped in brilliant colours) for use when conditions were favourable. Each ship carried somewhere about a hundred warriors, who took their turns at the rowing. The earliest raiding parties consisted of no more than one or two of these crews ; but when their victims began to expect them and to organise some sort of resistance, larger fleets were formed—sometimes of a hundred ships or more. The adventurers must often have paid the price of their audacity in the stormy seas and treacherous currents that surround our coasts, and there is record that in the summer of 878 a great south-easterly gale piled up the wreckage of 120 of their ships in Swanage Bay.

Often a party would set out with no definite objective, going perhaps from the coast of Frisia across to Essex, then, maybe, down the coast to Brittany, then on to Ireland, then back to Sussex, and so on. But on the whole we may say that the Swedes confined themselves mainly to the shores of the Baltic, and the Danes to those of England and northern France, while the longer voyages, including those to Ireland and western Scotland, were mostly made by men from the Norwegian fiords.

23. *First Settlements in England*

The Vikings paid their first visit to the shores of England in 793, but for the next forty years they did not give much trouble. It was only when Egbert was succeeded by his much less able

## VIKING ROUTES.



son, *Ethelwulf*, that they discovered how defenceless the kingdom was and how rich the spoil that might be gained there. Their first attacks then became more frequent and more devastating, until by 870 they had blotted out almost every sign of Christianity and civilisation along the east coast. We can only imagine with



what terror the unfortunate inhabitants must have seen their long-ships swooping down, what misery and devastation they must have left behind when they departed. They seem to have taken a particular delight in slaughtering monks and destroying monasteries—perhaps as a sort of revenge for the Christian wars of Charlemagne in Germany.

The English were fond of fighting among themselves, but they had no military organisation capable of dealing with such enemies as these. Most of them were by this time tillers of the soil, and even the fighting men of the king's war bands were generally scattered about the countryside living on their estates. In any case, the English were mere amateur warriors compared with their enemies. Constant practice had made the Vikings specialists in the fine art of carrying out these raids. In their attacks on Frankish lands they had learnt to equip themselves with effective body-armour; their two-handed battle-axe was a far more formidable weapon than any possessed by the English; and they had picked up all the latest ideas in warfare—the shield wall in defence and the wedge formation in attack.

At first they usually ran their ships up an estuary, landed, sacked the nearest monastery or village, and sailed away with the booty. Later on, when their parties increased in numbers and they were compelled to go farther inland to find suitable booty, they began to capture horses to carry them swiftly to the scene of action. Ethelwulf and his successors were helpless, for they never knew where the foe would strike next. Small defence forces were cut to pieces, large ones could not be concentrated in time. Even if some local ealdorman managed to collect enough of his half-armed villagers to give him a chance of success through sheer weight of numbers, the raiders would simply slip back to their ships and sail off to some more promising spot. Of course, the Norsemen were not always successful in this game. Once, at any rate, in 851, a large party of them was utterly destroyed near Basingstoke, and for a few years after that southern England enjoyed a respite. But then a fresh stage in the attacks began. In 855 a band of Danes did not return home according to their usual custom before the autumnal gales made the North Sea unsafe; they spent the winter in the Isle of Sheppey.

The fact was that the raiding business was ceasing to be

really profitable, for there was no loot left within striking distance of the coast. The limited area of the habitable parts of Scandinavia made some of those who had hitherto been mere raiders determine to make permanent homes for themselves on this side of the water. In 867 a "great host," as a chronicler calls it, under two famous Danish leaders named Ingwar and Halfden, completely overthrew the kingdom of Northumbria and took permanent possession of what is now Yorkshire. Two years later East Anglia shared the same fate, after its king, Edmund, had been shot to death with arrows in circumstances that caused the Church to regard him as a martyr for the faith.\* In 871 the "great host"—now many thousands strong—pressed on southwards to attack Wessex itself. Two of Ethelwulf's sons had spent short and troubled reigns in trying to cope with desultory raids; *Ethelred*, the third of the brothers, was now called upon to face this far more formidable threat. In the course of a long drawn out campaign up and down the Thames Valley he succeeded in checking the enemy at least once, at *Ashdown*; but a few weeks later his own forces were completely defeated in a great battle fought somewhere to the west of Reading (possibly at Wilton), and Ethelred himself died a few days later—presumably of wounds received in the fighting. It seemed as if nothing could now prevent the submergence of Wessex and the final extinction of Anglo-Saxondom.

But at this stage a new factor came into play—the genius and character of a great man.

#### 24. *Alfred the Great in War and Peace*

The kingship of Wessex now fell to *Alfred*, the youngest of the four sons of Ethelwulf, a young man of twenty-three. As a lad he had been taken by his father on a visit to Rome, and this experience of more civilised lands and more cultured peoples had a profound effect upon his mind and character. On his shoulders now rested the whole burden of defending what was left of civilisation in these islands. For seven years he carried on the struggle with fluctuating fortune, sometimes repelling the foes by force of arms, sometimes bribing them with money; but in 878 the Danes succeeded by a surprise attack in the middle of

\* His name is perpetuated in Bury St. Edmunds.

winter in overrunning all western Wessex right down to Exeter. Alfred was compelled to take refuge with a handful of followers at Athelney, at that time a mere island of dry land amidst the desolate marshes of the River Parret in Somersetshire, while the Danes hilariously devoured the Christmas dinner which had been prepared for him at his royal manor of Chippenham. But the King's spirit did not fail him. He contrived to get together an army, despite the fact that the surrounding country was in the enemy's possession. He paid the Danes back in kind by suddenly striking at them before they had recovered from the effects of their good fare, and severely defeated them at the famous battle of *Ethandune*. So entirely did this reverse the situation that the Danish leader, Guthrum, accepted the terms known as the *Treaty of Wedmore* (sometimes called the Pact of Chippenham). Alfred was to be left in undisturbed possession of Wessex, provided that he would recognise Guthrum as ruler of the eastern and midland parts of the country ; and, in addition, the Danes undertook to become Christians. An even more striking testimony to the impression made by Alfred's personality is the fact that Guthrum kept his word ; and a few years later the treaty was amended so that western Mercia and Middlesex (including London) became part of Alfred's kingdom. The boundary between this and " the Danelaw " ran along Watling Street, the old Roman road from London to Chester.

Perhaps the loyalty of Guthrum to the Pact of Chippenham was partly due to certain reforms which Alfred made in the military system of Wessex which greatly strengthened his defences. First, at places exposed to attack he established townships called " burhs," fortified by earthworks such as the Danes themselves made ; and he provided garrisons for these little strongholds by granting lands in the neighbourhood in return for military service. This was the origin of many modern towns in the south of England. Secondly, he greatly increased the number and efficiency of the fighting men he could call upon, by granting the rank of " thegnhood " to many who had hitherto only ranked as " ceorls," provided that they would fulfil the corresponding military duties ; and he arranged that even in time of peace they should take turns, one month in three, to attend him and form a permanent striking force. Similarly,

# ENGLAND IN THE TIME OF ALFRED



the "fyrd," or general muster of all men of military age, which was only called up in an emergency, was divided into two parts so that the indispensable work of husbandry might go on at all times. Lastly, he built a small war fleet to protect the coasts.

Successful as Alfred was in protecting Wessex from the ravages of the Danes, he was not by temperament a man of war. He was deeply and sincerely religious, and it was his highest aim to promote the Christian life among his people. He has been called "the English Charlemagne" because of his enthusiasm for education and religion; but there was a fine simplicity about his character which was lacking in his prototype, and he was far less ambitious for personal dominion. He learnt to read—a very rare accomplishment among laymen in those days—and it is even said that he could write. There is some doubt about this last, however. It is true that he was the author of several translations from Latin into Anglo-Saxon—the "Ecclesiastical History of Bede" was one of these—but it is probable that he dictated them to priestly scribes. He also set on foot the keeping of a regular record of current events, the famous "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," the first historical work to be written in a modern language. He caused Pope Gregory's treatise on "Pastoral Care" to be sent round to all the bishops to instruct them in their duties. He established a school to which the sons of his thegns were sent, and thus for the next few generations England had the advantage—unique in those times—of an educated ruling class.\* He spent a large proportion of his income on skilled foreign artificers to instruct his subjects by example in the arts of architecture, metal work, and the illumination of manuscripts. In all this we see evidence that he realised the shortcomings of his own epoch. All around he saw traces of the great Roman civilisation. He and his courtiers were clad in woollen homespuns instead of in the fine fabrics worn by upper-class Roman citizens; they lived in draughty wooden shacks instead of in central-heated, brick-built villas; his governmental and military systems were of barbarous

\* It brings home to us why these are called "The Dark Ages" when we reflect that seven or eight centuries earlier all the well-to-do people read and wrote as a matter of course. If one of the Roman governors of Britain could have come back to life in A.D. 900 he would have thought King Alfred a mere uncouth barbarian.

simplicity compared with the highly developed organisation of the Roman Empire. He saw that civilisation had slipped ; and it was his life's work to put it on the road to recovery. Soldier, statesman, and scholar, his days were full of mental and physical activity ; and all the time he was hampered by a mysterious malady which often caused him great suffering and eventually carried him off (900) while still in the prime of life.

Most of the heroes of history have their detractors—historians who throw doubts on their abilities and their virtues ; but nobody has ever done this about Alfred. He always has taken, and always must take, a high place among the wisest and noblest rulers of any age or country.

### 25. *The Re-Conquest of the Danelaw*

*Edward the Elder* (900–924) was a worthy son and successor to Alfred. To be sure, he had a much easier task. In the twenty years since the formation of the Danelaw thousands of the Northmen had settled down on farms there and had thus given hostages to fortune. If they attacked Wessex now it was always possible to retaliate by a counter invasion that would draw them back to defend their homes, and when fresh bands of Vikings came from overseas to attack Wessex through the Danelaw their compatriots there gave them very little encouragement.

Nevertheless, during the first fifteen years of Edward's reign danger always threatened. In his efforts to keep the Danes in check he was actively supported by his sister Ethelfled, who had married the Earl of Mercia (now limited to the country between Watling Street and the Welsh border). This lady inherited even more of her father's spirit than Edward himself ; and though her husband seems to have been a man of some capacity, she proved herself his "better-half." She showed remarkable energy and insight in the measures she took to keep both Danes and Welsh on their own side of the boundaries. She planted "burhs" at various important strategic points ; she restored the military strength of Chester, and re-peopled the neighbourhood with English settlers in order to break up communication between the Northumbrian Danes and their kinsmen in Ireland ; and she took an active part in her brother's campaigns in the field.

The crisis of Edward's reign came in the years 916-919, when a series of irritating raids by individual Danish leaders impelled him to undertake the re-conquest of the Danelaw. This task proved easier than might have been expected, for several reasons. First, there was now no central government there—the province was ruled by a number of independent chieftains called “jarls.” Secondly, the wilder spirits among the Danes, who chafed against the return to settled life, had mostly gone off to seek adventures elsewhere. Thirdly, the Danes had little national feeling and were for the most part not unwilling to come under the rule of Wessex, provided that they could keep their own laws and customs and were assured of the undisturbed possession of their lands.

Thus, after Edward had invaded East Anglia and won a great victory over the disturbers of his peace in Essex, the rest of his campaign was little more than a triumphal procession. The jarls of the East Midlands were now eager to make terms with him ; and when he advanced to the Peak Country and was preparing to invade Northumbria the Danish chieftain who had been misgoverning those parts hastened to meet trouble half-way by coming to meet him and acknowledge him as overlord.

Thus, during the last few years of his reign Edward the Elder could feel that he had completed the political work begun by his father. He was, indeed, the first real King of England. Egbert and Offa had only possessed vague claims to suzerainty over East Anglia, Essex, Mercia, and Kent ; but these provinces had been obliterated by the Danish conquests. Now that the Danelaw had itself been re-conquered the whole country was united under one king in a way that had never before been possible. Even the death of Ethelfled in 918 contributed towards this end. Her husband, the Earl, had died some years before, but as long as she was alive Western Mercia had remained half independent. Her death enabled Edward to incorporate it in the kingdom he was creating.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *What does England owe to Alfred ?*
- (2) *Why do we say that Edward the Elder was a worthy successor to Alfred ?*

# THE ANGLO-SAXON KINGS OF ENGLAND

	924				
930		ÆTHELSTAN			930
		937 ✕ Brunanburgh (§28)			
940			940	Abbot of lastonbury	940
950		946	EDRED		950
			955	EDWY	Exiled
960				Recalled	960
			EDGAR		
970					970
			975	EDWARD	
980		978 Re-appearance of Danes (§30)	978	Retired	980
990			ETHELRED	991 Beginning of Danegeld (§30)	990
		994 Raid of Olaf Tryggvason	THE		
1000			UNREADY		1000
		1002 Massacre of St. Brice (§30)			
1010					1010
		1016 ✕ Assandune (§30)		EDMUND IRONSIDE	
1020					1020
			CNUT		
1030		DANISH DYNASTY		1028 Cnut conquers Norway (§31)	1030
			1035		
1040			HAROLD HAREFOOT HARTHACNUT		1040
			1042		
		EARL GODWIN IN POWER (§34)	EDWARD		
1050		-1051 Exile of Godwin (§34)	THE	1051 Visit of Duke William (§34)	1050
		1052 Return of Godwin (§34)			
		1053 Death of Godwin (§34)			
1060		1053	CONFESSOR	1057 Death of Edward Atheling (§35)	1060
		EARL HAROLD IN POWER (§35)			
		1066 ✕ Stamford Bridge &		1066 1064 Harold in Normandy (§35)	



## CHAPTER VI

### The Anglo-Saxon Kings of England

(924-1014)

*In this chapter we shall sum up the effects of the Norse element in the national character and notice how a similar element produced very dissimilar results across the Channel ; we shall see that several successive Anglo-Saxon kings laid claim to supremacy over the whole of Great Britain, and how the country fell a second time before Danish conquerors.*

#### 26. What England Owes to the Danes

During the half-century following the re-conquest of the Danelaw the Danes became thoroughly fused with the native population in eastern and northern England. Piracy had only been a passing phase of their social history. Those of them who had now found an opportunity to settle down on good farm-lands in England soon lost the Viking spirit and reverted to the avocations of their ancestors. There were no newspapers then to keep alive national hatreds, and a new generation of Christianised Danes began to feel shame when they remembered how their fathers had split the shaven heads of monks and carried off the golden chalices of monasteries. Having taken up trading and farming again, they wanted what all armers and traders want—peace and order and good government, and these blessings they could only find under the rule of the Wessex kings. They had not conquered these lands under the leadership of some great prince seeking to carve out an empire for himself, nor had they embittered the native English by making slaves of them. When, therefore, Edward

the Elder undertook to leave them free to keep their own traditional system of law and their own administrative officers, they quickly settled down under his rule.

One of the most notable characteristics in which the Danes differed from their Anglo-Saxon kinsmen was the fact that they had not the same dislike for town life. Trade had always played an important part in their lives in Scandinavia, and trade can only be carried on where people are gathered together in considerable numbers. The palisaded strongholds which had been built about the midlands for military purposes began now to take on a commercial character, especially when Edward the Elder made a law that, in order to prevent disputes (which too often led to bloodshed among these simple folk), all buying and selling was to be done in the presence of a "town reeve" in a recognised market. We must not suppose that these primitive "towns" were much like those of modern times. Their permanent population was limited to a few score or even a few dozen inhabitants. It was only on market-days that they were filled with the people from the farms in the neighbourhood. Still, this was a new element in the national life, and one destined to increase steadily in importance as the years went by.

### *27. The Norsemen in France*

The early years of the tenth century saw events in northern France which were destined to have profound effects upon English history. The Empire of Charlemagne (§ 19) had fallen to pieces, and out of the fragments the two monarchies of France and Germany were growing up. The ravages of the Norsemen had taken much the same course against France that they had taken against England: first mere pillage; then permanent settlement; then a formal concession of territory from the king. King Charles the Simple of France found himself even less able to dislodge them from their colonies in the valley of the Seine than King Alfred the Great had been to drive them out of England. When one of the most famous of their leaders, Rollo by name, made preparations for a great attack on Paris itself, Charles bought him off by offering to give him possession of all northern France on condition that he would become a Christian

and recognise him as overlord. Rollo accepted the proposal, was duly baptised, and was henceforth known as "Duke Robert of Normandy." A sort of Danelaw had been formed in France like that which had been formed in England thirty years before; but it is noteworthy that France was a stage behind England in the matter. Just at the time when England was being strengthened and unified by the re-conquest of the Danelaw, France was being weakened and disunited by the carving out of Normandy; for the new province was ruled by a succession of particularly able dukes, and centuries passed before it was once more incorporated in the dominions ruled directly by the King of France.

We see another curious example of racial chemistry in the fact that the compound of Northman and Frank produced something utterly different from the compound of Northman with Anglo-Saxon. The children and grand-children of the Scandinavian pirates who found homes in northern France became the most civilised people in Europe. They adopted a modified form of French as their mother tongue; they took up and carried to perfection the new methods of warfare—fighting in armour on horseback and building stone fortresses; and they soon began to display remarkable talents for organisation. Before long Normandy was by far the best governed of the principalities of France, and a party of warriors from the Duchy formed a remarkable new state in Sicily and southern Italy. And their organising power found scope also in the Church; their monasteries in particular were soon among the best conducted and most richly endowed in Europe.

### *28. The Hey-Day of the Anglo-Saxon Monarchy*

The Kingdom of England having been created by Edward the Elder, his son *Athelstan* made it an empire. A rebellion broke out among the Danes of Northumbria soon after his accession, and he crushed this with such exemplary vigour that the rulers of the Celtic parts of the island—the Scots beyond the Cheviots, the Welsh of Strathclyde and North Wales—all came to a great council held somewhere in the Lake District and acknowledged his overlordship. His pride in his position may

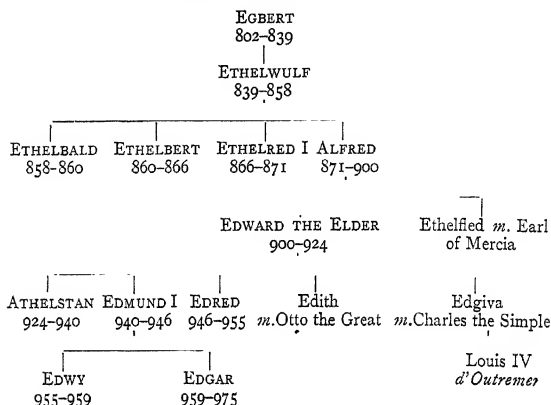
be judged from the resounding titles which he adopted on his coins and in his public documents: "Rex Totius Britanniae," "Basileus," "Rex Monarchus," and so on. Yet his authority over the outlying parts of his "empire" was little more than a name, and he had a good deal of difficulty to maintain even that; for the Celtic rulers soon began to chafe at their subordination and to set on foot a conspiracy against him. The ringleader was Constantine III of Scotland ("grey-haired warrior, old deceiver" as a Saxon poem calls him) who formed a league with the Strathclyde Welsh and the Irish Vikings to wrest Northumbria from his grasp. This alliance Athelstan crushed at the great battle of *Brunanburgh* (937), fought in the neighbourhood of Solway Firth; and for the rest of his reign he had no trouble with Scot or Dane. He was, therefore, free to apply himself to organising the recently acquired parts of central and eastern England. For this purpose he made use of the Danish towns and Ethelfled's "burhs." Each of the shires which he carved out was ruled from one of these centres, and we can see evidence of this in the fact that to this day the midland counties (in contrast to those of southern England) are nearly all named after their county towns.

We can judge of the importance which England had by this time gained in the eyes of Europe when we note the marriages made by Athelstan's sisters. One of them married Otto the Great, King of Germany, who later on revived the claims of Charlemagne and founded the "Holy Roman Empire," which lasted right down to 1806. Another married Charles the Simple, King of France; and when that monarch was dethroned and imprisoned by rebellious vassals she sent her young son Louis to be brought up at her brother's court in England. A third sister married Hugh, Count of Paris, the most powerful noble in France, who eventually brought back this prince to be King Louis IV (surnamed *d'Outremer*—"from over the sea") after the death of Charles the Simple.

## 29. *The First Great English Churchman-Statesman*

Athelstan's death in 940 was followed by four short reigns—those of his two brothers *Edmund* and *Edred*, and of his

## THE EARLIER ANGLO-SAXON KINGS



two nephews *Edwy* and *Edgar*. Three of these princes seem to have been men of some distinction, but they all died young. Indeed, energy of character and weakness of health were family traits in the descendants of Egbert.

The most notable personality during these four reigns was *St. Dunstan* (924-988). Brought up at the court of Athelstan, he always delighted in music and poetry, metal-work and wood-carving, and some of his companions resented his preference for things of the mind over their grosser pleasures. He fled from their rough handling to his uncle, the Bishop of Winchester, who persuaded him to become a monk. But although he had fits of ascetic devotion, when he would go and live as a hermit in a tiny cell, his general bent was towards the active life of the statesman. On the death of Athelstan the young King Edmund recalled him to the court, made him a regular member of the Royal Council, and gave him the abbacy of Glaston—all at the early age of twenty-three. Edred, the next king, was a permanent invalid, and during his short reign all the work of government fell on Dunstan's shoulders. Then followed another

turn of fortune's wheel. Edwy, who succeeded to Edred, was a weak-willed boy under the domination of a designing woman who wanted him to marry her daughter. Dunstan's protests against her evil influence merely led to his being driven abroad to escape her resentment. But a year later the leading men of the midlands combined to throw off the unworthy rule of Edwy and his mother-in-law-elect. They chose as their king Edwy's younger brother Edgar and sent for Dunstan from Flanders to act as chief minister. The country was threatened with partition, possibly with civil war; but the situation was saved a year later by the death of Edwy and the recognition of Edgar as King of all England.

Dunstan remained Edgar's chief friend and counsellor all through his reign. Those sixteen years were peaceful and prosperous, and in the troublous times to come men looked back on them as a sort of golden age of peace and prosperity. We ought, perhaps, to take the praises which the chroniclers shower upon Edgar with a grain of salt, for the writers were all monks, and Edgar had gained their good opinion by notable services to their order. The Church had never, up to this time, recovered from the depredations of the Vikings. In many parts of the country the monastic buildings were in ruins, and their diminished revenues were squandered by so-called monks who lived in their own homes with their wives and families and often neglected even the services in the minster churches. In France a great revival of religious zeal was now in full swing. Monastic life had fallen to almost as low an ebb there as in England, but in 910 a monastery had been established at *Cluny*, wherein the "rule" of St. Benedict was rigidly enforced. The time was ripe for such an institution, and the fame, membership, and wealth of Cluny grew rapidly. Before long similar monasteries were founded in various parts of France, all of them maintaining a close connection with the parent abbey and obedient to its abbot. This unity of organisation was something new. Monasteries had hitherto been independent of each other, which had led to wide variations in practice and great laxity in discipline. In the "Clunian" establishments the rule of St. Benedict was for the first time carried out on a uniform and definite plan.

The movement now spread to England. Dunstan had taken the first steps in this direction when in his younger days he had become Abbot of Glaston, and now under Edgar he was in a position to undertake a general reform of the English monasteries. A warm-hearted and genial man, he always preferred to turn men's hearts in the right direction by persuasion rather than to exact obedience by harsh measures ; but some of his fellow workers allowed no such considerations to weaken their zeal. They compelled easy-going clerics to choose between living strictly or being expelled. Besides this tightening up of discipline, many new monasteries were founded and old ones re-endowed with lands, notably those at Ely and at Peterborough.

Dunstan was the first English Churchman-statesman, the forerunner of Becket and Wolsey, and his position as chief counsellor to three kings greatly increased the power and prestige of the Church in England.

### 30. *The Second Danish Conquest*

Edgar left two sons, *Edward* (aged thirteen) by his first marriage, and *Ethelred* (aged seven) by his second. The Witan naturally chose the elder of the two boys as king, and Dunstan once more undertook the duties of guardian-regent. But he was getting old and losing his grip. The widowed queen set on foot a plot to place her own son Ethelred upon the throne, yet the archbishop took no effective counter-measures, even when the conspiracy culminated in the assassination of the young king at Corfe in Dorset. This meant the end of Dunstan's career as a statesman. He retired to Canterbury and spent the last years of his life in Church affairs.

The reign of Ethelred, which thus began with fratricide, was destined to be the longest but also the most disastrous in early English history. The Vikings reappeared in the very year of his accession. For the next ten years the reputation for strength which the kingdom had gained under Athelstan and Edgar was sufficient to save it from anything worse than occasional flying raids ; but then the attacks began again in earnest, and they only ended a quarter of a century later in the complete overthrow of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy

During the hundred years since Alfred made his peace with Guthrum (§ 24) the two kingdoms of Norway and Denmark had arisen in the Scandinavian lands. Nevertheless, the first important raid of the new series was made by a heathen adventurer of the old type, one Olaf Tryggvason, who "sharked up a list of lawless resolute" for a descent on East Anglia. The later generation of Norse pirates seems to have felt no racial sympathy with the Anglo-Danes of the old Danelaw, who had by this time become thoroughly English. Ethelred was no warrior: his only resource was to bribe Olaf to depart with a sum of ten thousand pounds of silver. He thereby laid up a store of trouble for himself and his country, since there was nothing to prevent Olaf and his friends coming again next year to ask for more. This was what they did; and in 994 Olaf joined forces with *King Svein*\* of Denmark for an attack in strength on London, already the commercial capital of England. The Londoners put up such a stout resistance that the invaders decided to draw off and attack Sussex instead. This was sufficient to gain their purpose, however—the offer of a ransom even larger than before. It is striking evidence of the general advance in civilisation during the tenth century that thousands of pounds of silver could thus be raised year after year, for in the time of King Alfred the "wergild" of men of the highest rank had been only 120 shillings, which had then seemed an immense sum; and it is equally noteworthy that the Danes should now have been willing to take money with which to buy property in their own country instead of the goods and chattels which they had carried off in the old days. So regular did their demands become that Ethelred had to collect a permanent tax called "Danegeld" for the express purpose of bribing them.

Ethelred and his counsellors were utterly unable to grapple with the situation. Alfred himself had been compelled to buy the Danes off with money in the early stages of his struggle with them; but he had made good use of the respite thus gained to re-organise his forces and beat them in the field. Ethelred was too incompetent to do more than discuss ambitious schemes which he could never put into action. It was during these disastrous years that he earned his nickname of "The Unready"

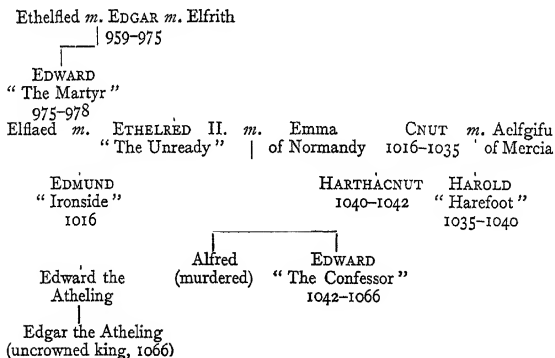
\* Sometimes spelt "Swegen" or "Sweyn."



## 64 THE ANGLO-SAXON KINGS OF ENGLAND

(*i.e.* the Redeless, the ill-advised). At last he employed the desperate expedient of hiring some of the Vikings to defend him from the rest; but this counsel of despair had its usual result: one of the leaders of the mercenaries deserted him at a critical moment and extorted a ransom of £24,000. In impotent fury at this treachery the King organised a massacre of all the other Danes in his service on St. Brice's Day, 1002. A thirst for vengeance was now added to the Danes' former appetite for plunder, and they began a series of attacks which ended in the complete conquest of the country. When in 1012 Svein demanded the unheard-of sum of £48,000 the impossibility of raising the money at a moment's notice gave him an excuse to ravage the midlands. Then he and his men crossed the Thames and made their way to Canterbury, where they captured Archbishop Alphege and later murdered him in a drunken orgy. As soon as Ethelred managed to wring the special Danegeld out of his unlucky subjects he paid it over meekly to these savages, without so much as a protest. There was only one degree of baseness to which he could descend, and he reached this the following year when he fled to Normandy to take refuge with this brother-in-law, Duke Robert II.

### THE LATER PRE-CONQUEST KINGS



Svein was now master of the whole of England, but he died in the moment of triumph. His son *Cnut*, who was with him at the moment of his death, had to hasten back to Denmark to settle with his brother about the succession ; and this gave Ethelred's son *Edmund* an opportunity to raise an army. When Cnut came back across the North Sea with forces lent to him by his brother as the price of his renunciation of the throne of Denmark, a great struggle took place between the two young men. For a time Edmund had the best of it, and Ethelred plucked up courage to return from Normandy. But his presence in England was a hindrance rather than a help to his cause, especially as he insisted on giving high command to an untrustworthy personal favourite named Edwin Streona. When, a year or two later, Ethelred died and Edmund was chosen king, the opportunity for expelling the Danes had passed. After a brilliant campaign, in which Edmund earned the nickname of " Ironside," he was defeated at the *Battle of Assington*, and was compelled to agree to a partition of the kingdom by which the old Danelaw was revived. It is possible that Edmund might in time have re-conquered it, but a year later he died. There remained no member of his family fitted by age or character to make headway against the Danes, and when Cnut claimed the whole kingdom the Witan made a virtue of necessity and offered him the crown.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *What were the effects of the Danish element in the British race ?*
- (2) *Compare the first Danish Conquest with the second.*

## CHAPTER VII

### Anglo-Dane and Anglo-Norman

(1016-1066)

*For the half-century that preceded the Norman Conquest England was under foreign influences : first, that of Cnut, who, though a Dane by birth, ruled as though he were an Englishman, and then (after a chaotic interlude under Cnut's worthless sons) that of Edward the Confessor, who, though an Englishman by birth, ruled as though he were a Norman.*

#### 31. King Cnut

The Witan had elected Cnut chiefly because it was afraid of him, but as matters turned out it could not have made a better choice. The young king (he was only twenty-two years old at his accession) had hitherto followed in his father's footsteps as a ruthless freebooter and slayer of monks, but he now turned over a new leaf. He adopted Christianity and soon began to outdo the late King Edgar in piety and good works. He realised how valuable the support of the Church would be in holding the kingdom together. He was ostentatiously devout in attending public worship, he went on a pilgrimage to Rome, he was lavish in building churches and monasteries and generous in endowing them, he constantly relied on the counsel of bishops and abbots. He had the body of the martyred Alphege reverently re-interred in Canterbury Cathedral. Moreover, he showed from the first a statesmanlike determination not to play the part of a foreign conqueror. Soon after his accession he became also King of Denmark, owing to the death of his brother, and he later added Norway and Iceland to his dominions ; but even after he had thus become the ruler of a sort of Nordic Empire astride the North Sea he always looked upon England as his home and his main interest ; indeed, he only visited his

other dominions when compelled to do so by some emergency. To a great Witanagemot held at Oxford in 1018 he declared his intention to rule "according to the good laws of King Edgar," and he kept his word. Among the magnates to whom he entrusted the government of the half-dozen provinces into which he divided the country quite as many were Englishmen as were Danes—notably the famous Godwin, who became Earl of Wessex and his most trusted counsellor.

Cnut's first act was to marry Queen Emma, the widow of Ethelred, who had taken refuge with her kinsman, the Duke of Normandy. This was a wise move on the young king's part, for it freed him from any danger of plots on behalf of her two sons, who were left to be brought up by their uncle, Duke Richard. It was agreed at the time of the marriage that a son born of it should succeed to the throne in preference both to them and to Harold Harefoot, Cnut's son by an earlier marriage.

As soon as Cnut had made his position secure he sent back to Denmark most of the fleet and army with which he had come to fight for it. He retained only forty ships and a body-guard of two or three thousand professional fighting men. These Anglo-Danish "huscarles" were not endowed with land like the thegns, but were a military brotherhood supported out of the Danegeld, which thus developed into a permanent tax. With no territorial interests or duties to draw them away from the court they were always at hand to be a source of power and dignity to the monarchy.

### 32. *The End of Danish Rule*

When we speak of all England being united from the time of Egbert onwards we must not suppose that there was any central government in our modern sense of the term. Before the Norman Conquest the great noblemen who ruled the provinces such as Northumbria and East Anglia in the king's name were left pretty much to themselves even under a strong king like Cnut; under a weak one they became practically independent, and the government fell into confusion. Such a position arose after the sudden death of Cnut at the early age of forty-one (1035).

So unexpected was this event that no definite arrangements

had been made for the succession. It was well known that the late king had intended Harthacnut, his son by Emma of Normandy, to succeed him ; but this young man was at the moment engaged in dealing with a rebellion in Denmark. Earl Godwin loyally supported Cnut's wishes ; but the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria put forward the claims of *Harold Harefoot*, who had the two-fold advantage of being several years older and of having been born of an English mother. For a time it seemed as if a civil war would break out between the rival factions ; but as the months went by and Harthacnut did not return, Godwin felt unable to maintain his claim and agreed to the nomination of Harold by the Witan.

Unfortunately, Cnut's abilities and virtues as a ruler were not inherited by either of his sons. The only notable event in the five years of Harold Harefoot's reign was a deed of horrible cruelty on his part. Alfred, the elder of the sons of Ethelred the Unready and Emma, came over from Normandy with a band of personal followers, ostensibly merely on a visit to his mother, but really to find some means of gaining the throne. Earl Godwin met him with professions of support but betrayed him into the hands of King Harold, who had his eyes put out with such barbarity that he died a few weeks later.

Shortly afterwards Harold himself died. He had no children, and was succeeded by *Harthacnut*, who had by this time abandoned his attempt to gain the throne of Denmark. Harthacnut proved as incapable and bloodthirsty as his half-brother, and there was a general feeling of relief when he, too, died prematurely—apparently of apoplexy “ as he stood to his drink,” to quote the “ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.” The only possible candidate for the throne now was *Edward*, the younger brother of the ill-fated Alfred. This was a return to the old royal line of Wessex, the descendants of Egbert and Alfred the Great. The rapid extinction of Cnut's family had important results in English history. A succession of Danish kings would have made the country a Scandinavian sea-power completely out of touch with the general current of European affairs ; but, as matters turned out, the only permanent result of the episode of Danish rule was the opening of a regular trade-route for merchants across the North Sea and into the Baltic.

33. *A Crowned Monk*

If the Witan supposed that by inviting Edward to come across the Channel and occupy the throne of his fathers they were bringing about a return to government by English traditions and ideas, they were much mistaken. Edward was half-English by blood, but in every other respect he was a foreigner. The Normans, among whom he had spent almost the whole of the thirty-seven years of his life, had become the most vigorous and intelligent people in Europe (§ 27). In government, in Church organisation, in warfare, in law, they were in the forefront of the movement towards that remarkable system of life and thought which historians call "medieval." To Edward, brought up among the pioneers of a new civilisation, his English subjects seemed deplorably uncouth. It was only natural that he should seek to remedy their barbarism by bringing over Norman friends to be his courtiers, Norman magnates to rule the provinces, and Norman clerics to reform the Church; but it was equally natural that the Englishmen thus displaced should feel resentful.

Still, Edward lacked the energy of will necessary to carry out consistently this or any other line of policy, and he was always afraid of offending the English nobles, especially the high and mighty Earl Godwin. Nor did he take the smallest step towards giving England what she needed most at the time—internal unity. His only notion of keeping the great magnates in check was to set them against each other, which in the long run made them more powerful and independent than ever.

As a matter of fact, he cared very little in his heart for any such worldly matters. Most of his early life had been passed in monasteries, and it has been said of him that he was more fitted to be a Norman monk than to be an English king. He spent a large part of each day in personal devotions, and his chief interest in life (apart from hunting, now fast becoming a fashionable pastime for the upper classes) was the building of a great abbey just outside London, afterwards known as Westminster. A century after his death he was made a saint and given the title of "The Confessor" (*i.e.* the priest) by the Pope. Monkish chroniclers of a later generation were full of his praises, for those of them who were English by blood revered him as the last of the old Wessex line of kings, while those of them who

were Normans revered him as the sovereign who paved the way for the Norman Conquest. As late as the thirteenth century men were still referring to "the good laws of Edward the Confessor"; but as a matter of fact, he did little or nothing as a legislator. The expression, "The Laws of Edward the Confessor," really means merely the Old English Law as it existed in its completest form—which it naturally reached on the eve of that Norman Conquest which so completely revolutionised this and every other aspect of the national life.

### 34. *The Great Earl Godwin*

During the first half of the reign the most conspicuous figure in the kingdom was Earl Godwin of Wessex. He had been advanced to the foremost position among the nobles by King Cnut, and it was doubtless out of respect for his patron that he had married a Danish wife and had given Danish names to his three sons, Svein, Harold, and Tostig. He was the leader of the native magnates who resisted Edward's predilection for Norman favourites, and he was always on the watch for opportunities for the advancement of his own family. His first triumph in this direction was in 1045, when he induced the King, who had remained a bachelor on religious principle till the ripe age of forty-two, to marry his daughter Edith. He then used his position as the King's father-in-law to obtain an earldom for his eldest son, Svein, in the Severn Valley, the earldom of East Anglia for his second son, Harold, and a third earldom for his nephew, Beorn, in the midlands. This open ambition to dominate the country aroused the hostility not only of the King's Norman courtiers, but also of the other English earls, especially Leofric of Mercia and Siward of Northumbria. In 1050 his enemies found a chance to bring about his downfall. His son Svein, a dissolute and reckless young ruffian, carried off an abbess from her convent and treacherously murdered his own cousin, Beorn. To the pious Edward the former was much the more dreadful of these offences, but both were serious; and Godwin placed himself in a false position by trying to shield the criminal from punishment. Taking advantage of the shock to public opinion among the ruling class, the King plucked up courage to appoint a Norman prelate, Robert of Jumièges, as Archbishop of

Canterbury, in defiance of Earl Godwin's efforts to obtain the position for an English friend of his own named Stigand. The breach was widened into an open quarrel by an incident which took place in the following year. One Eustace, Count of Boulogne, was returning to France after a visit to the court when his retinue became involved in a riot in Dover, in the course of which several of them were killed. The Count returned to ask for redress, and the King called upon Godwin as Earl of Wessex to punish the Dover people. Godwin refused, alleging that the fault had lain with the Count's men. Accusations and counter-accusations were made, and Godwin tried to raise a force to overawe the King. The thegns of Wessex made but a half-hearted response to his appeal, and when his enemies Siward and Leofric came in force to the King's support he was compelled to flee abroad with his sons and supporters. Edward was glad to be rid of the domineering earl and eagerly appointed Normans to the places left vacant by the fugitives.

This advancement of Norman favourites rallied public feeling to the support of Godwin and his family, especially when Edward's kinsman, the young Duke William of Normandy, took advantage of the situation to come on a visit with the scarcely-disguised object of inducing the King to promise him the succession to the throne. When within two years of his ignominious flight Godwin returned, his re-appearance was so popular (especially in his old earldom of Wessex and in London, where he landed) that the whole situation was reversed. Many of the King's nominees were frightened back to Normandy, while Godwin and his sons were restored to their old positions, and Stigand became Archbishop after all.

The old earl did not long survive his triumph, for he died in 1053. His eldest son, Svein, had died while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to expiate his misdeeds, and the earldom of Wessex now fell to the second son, Harold.

### 35. *The Great Earl Harold*

Harold succeeded to his father's influence in the government as well as to his possessions and titles. Indeed, his position soon became even stronger than Godwin's had been, for with the approach of old age King Edward became more and more



absorbed in his devotions, to the neglect of his duties as a king. Moreover, Harold was not, like his father, a mere man of action, but an able and far-sighted statesman. Sometimes he boldly pushed the fortunes of his family, sometimes he disarmed the jealousy of the other earls by moderation and generosity towards them; but always he was working away patiently and persistently towards an ambition far more vaulting than his father had ever conceived—nothing less than the throne itself.

The most important incident of the years immediately following Godwin's death was the expedition of Earl Siward of Northumbria against Macbeth, the usurping King of Scotland, on behalf of Malcolm, the rightful heir.\* Siward's only son was killed in the campaign, and when Siward himself died a few years later Harold obtained the earldom of Northumbria for his brother Tostig. A year or two later, Gyrth, another brother, became Earl of East Anglia, and a new earldom was carved out of the south-east midlands for the fifth of the brothers, Leofwine, while the territory in the Severn Valley which had formerly been ruled by Svein was now included in Harold's own earldom of Wessex. The whole country had thus come under the direct rule of Godwin's sons except Mercia, and people began to wonder how long even this exception would last.

In 1057 a serious obstacle was removed from Harold's path by the death of Edward the Atheling (*i.e.* "Edward the Crown Prince"), the only son of Edmund Ironside. There was now no relative of the King's who could possibly claim the throne except the Atheling's little son, Edgar, who would be too young to be a serious rival for many years to come. But soon afterwards an incident occurred which turned heavily against Earl Harold. While sailing along the south coast he was driven by a violent gale over to the shores of Normandy, where his ship was wrecked. By the cruel custom of the time, this misfortune made him the prisoner of the ruling prince on whose coast he was cast up. Duke William of Normandy, who as we have already seen had designs of his own on the English throne, made the most of the chance which had placed Harold in his power. He treated his rival with every

\* Contrary to the story as dramatised by Shakespeare, Malcolm's father, King Duncan, was not murdered but was killed in battle; and Macbeth ruled Scotland wisely and well for a dozen years.

courtesy and invited him to take part as a volunteer in a military expedition which he was making against a neighbouring province ; but he intimated to his guest-prisoner that as a condition of release he would require him to promise upon oath to support his (William's) claim to succeed King Edward. Harold had no option but to take the required oath ; but upon returning to England he hushed the whole affair up and doubtless tried to dismiss it from his memory.

He now set himself more assiduously than ever to build up a strong party among the English magnates. When his brother Tostig brought disgrace upon the family in much the same way as Svein had done, by treacherously murdering an enemy, he acquiesced in the forfeiture of his earldom of Northumbria to Morcar, the brother of Edwin, Earl of Mercia. He further sought to bind Edwin and Morcar to his cause by marrying their sister. He realised that their support would be worth more to him in the long run than that of the unprincipled and unruly Tostig, who had made himself very unpopular in Northumbria ; and he wanted to gain general favour among the members of the Witan in view of the crisis which was obviously approaching.

A year later that crisis arrived. King Edward fell ill while supervising the workmen engaged on his abbey at Westminster, and died in January, 1066. The "Chronicle" tells us that "the wise king committed his realm to that highly-born one, Harold's self" ; but, of course, the King had no real power to bequeath the crown ; that rested with the Witan. Since Edward had no near relative living the magnates had to choose a king outside the royal family. The result for which Harold had so long been preparing came to pass. The Witan felt that the man who had carried on the government so successfully for so many years in King Edward's name was the man best fitted to carry it on henceforward for himself. *Harold* was elected king and crowned at Westminster within a few weeks of Edward's death.

But what would Duke William say—and do—when he heard of it ?

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *Explain how the character and policy of Edward the Confessor paved the way for the Norman Conquest of England*
- (2) *How did Harold make his way to the throne ?*

## CHAPTER VIII

### Life in Old England

*The death of Edward the Confessor brings us to the eve of the Norman Conquest which was such a clearly-marked dividing line in our national history. It therefore behoves us to take stock of the conditions which prevailed in Old England before it gave place to a New England under the rule of kings who imported the social and political ideas which prevailed on the Continent. We shall find that in some respects the Conquest merely stimulated into greater activity developments which had been taking shape for a long time past.*

#### 36. Village Life

In the five or six centuries that has passed since the Nordic races had first overrun the Roman Empire a new civilisation had gradually grown up in Western Europe to replace that which was then destroyed. What historians call "The Dark Ages" were now giving place to "The Middle Ages." As we have seen (§ 11-12) the process was slower in England than on the Continent, and it took a rather different course. Whereas on the Continent the conquerors were themselves conquered by Roman ideas, and adopted much of the speech, the institutions, and the manners of their subjects, the Anglo-Saxons retained for centuries their racial character; and the civilisation which gradually developed among them in the course of the succeeding centuries was always distinctively Teutonic. The town-life of the Romans, for instance, was never completely destroyed on the Continent as it was in

England ; and while the Roman law remained the basis of the legal system almost everywhere else in Western Europe, in England all trace of it disappeared until the Normans brought it back again in the middle of the eleventh century.

In Anglo-Saxon times almost all the villages which to-day nestle so picturesquely in the English countryside were little outposts of pioneers. Life was lived in the open air, in ploughing and sowing and reaping crops, in lumbering and building log-dwellings, in hunting, trapping, or snaring bird and beast, in fishing in the rivers. The old pagan feasts which marked the progress of the revolving year were continued in new forms as festivals of the Christian Church. The "Yule-tide" which provided a break halfway through the dreary winter became Christmas; the very word "Easter" is derived from the name of a heathen goddess of Spring; Michaelmas marked the autumnal equinox when the fruits of the earth were garnered and cattle and poultry killed and salted down before the approach of winter made it impossible to feed them. Hunting played a very important part in life, especially during the winter when other fresh meat was almost unobtainable ; and it also served to keep in check the wolves and foxes and deer which would otherwise have played havoc with flocks and crops. The upper classes had not yet begun to "preserve" game for the pleasure of killing it ; the beasts and birds of the chase preserved themselves only too well.

In picturing to ourselves the daily lives of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors we must remember how isolated their villages were. Millions of men and women passed their whole lives without travelling ten miles from their homes. Unless the village belonged directly to the king—in which case the court would visit the great hall periodically—the inhabitants never came into contact with the royal government. To them the local magnate—he might be a thegn who served the king in war or he might be the abbot of a monastery—was all that the State is to us to-day. He maintained order, he collected the king's dues (especially Danegeld), he presided over the "moots" which carried on the communal life of the township. The very growth of the kingdom weakened the hold of the kings over it. Even an able king like Cnut had to appoint ealdormen (now beginning to

be called "earls") to rule three or four shires; and these ealdormen themselves appointed "reeves" to hold the shire-moots. As for the law that was administered in these courts, it had mostly grown out of immemorial tribal custom and differed in detail in different parts of the country. Folk lived simple lives in these days, free from most of the complications which necessitate the masses of legislation which regulate our existence to-day—they required no Road Bills or Factory Acts or Bankruptcy Laws. The "Codes" of the Anglo-Saxon kings, issued for the guidance of local courts, contained fewer words than many a single clause in a modern Act of Parliament. The commonest crimes for which they provided penalties were theft and murder; and even on the eve of the Conquest killing a man was still regarded as an injury to his kinsfolk rather than to the State. The only way in which the king tried to exercise authority was by compelling the relatives of the victim to accept the "wergild" fixed by the current tariff instead of starting a family feud.

### 37. *The Origin of Feudalism*

The position of authority held by local lords was part of a new relationship amongst men which had been growing up, not only in England but all over Western Europe, ever since the barbarians had settled within the Empire. That Empire had in its palmy days been governed by Imperial officials under the authority of the central government at Rome; but this system had long been decaying, and the barbarian inrush destroyed it altogether. The invaders, on the other hand, had in their homelands been ruled by tribal chieftains; but this system, too, had broken down in the upheaval. Nowadays, government is in the hands of the national State, but nothing of the sort existed in the sixth century or for many centuries to come. Yet men instinctively seek some ordered system by which to regulate their affairs, and there gradually emerged the arrangement which we call *Feudalism*. Of course, the men of those times did not consciously invent it; they just blindly groped their way towards some means of bringing order out of the chaos in which they found themselves, and the circumstances

of the time made their efforts take this shape. Nor did the people who lived under Feudalism call it by that name—they probably did not give it a name at all. To them it seemed the natural and inevitable arrangement of land-owning and administration, for it grew up imperceptibly in the course of several centuries as a result of two distinct causes working together.

(1) One of these was the fact that Teutonic warriors had long been in the habit of attaching themselves to some leader who had won fame as a fighting man, and voluntarily serving under his command in their inter-tribal conflicts. Tacitus, the Roman historian, mentioned this practice in an account of the Germans which he wrote centuries before they broke into the Empire. He called such bands of warriors *comitatus*, and the members of it *comites* (i.e. companions). The Imperial dominions in general and England in particular were conquered by parties organised on this basis, and the relationship was intensified when such parties began to settle down in the new lands. For it was natural that the war-chief should divide the lands that he had won among his followers who had won them, on condition that they continued to fight for him when called upon either to defend the new settlement or to extend it by further conquests. Thus, the feeling grew up that a man held land in return for service instead of holding it as a member of a tribe, as hitherto. And it was not long before the idea was developed a stage further. The thegn (or *comes* as Tacitus would have called him) prided himself on being a fighting man; he felt it beneath him to plough and sow. Yet these humble operations had to be carried on, for even noble warriors must be provided with food and drink. He therefore made grants of land to persons of humbler rank on condition that they cultivated his land as well as their own—another example of the same general conception of *land for service*.

(2) That conception was strengthened by another process which was going on at the same time. The influx of primitive peoples continued intermittently for centuries, and the destruction of the *Pax Romana* was followed by a fierce and prolonged struggle for existence in which might was right. During such periods as the Danish inroads on England, for instance, the small landowner could not but feel anxious and insecure. He looked

about for support, for his own resources were far too limited to enable him to ward off danger to life and property, while the king's government was too distant (and often too weak) to protect him. He therefore went to some more powerful land-owner in the neighbourhood, to whom he offered to surrender his land on the understanding that he was to be allowed the use of it and protected in the possession of it by the lord. In return he would undertake to be loyal to the lord and fight for him when called upon.

### 38. *The Theory of Feudalism*

By about A.D. 1000 the lawyers of France and Italy were building up an elaborate theory to fit the situation which had been created by innumerable acts such as those just described. The apex of the social pyramid according to this theory was the sovereign, who was regarded as a supreme landlord—though some maintained that even he was a feudal tenant, holding from God. Nobles held their lands from the sovereign in return for an undertaking to support him in time of war with so many armed and mounted warriors, the number being proportionate to the area of the estate or “fief.” These warriors (or “knights” as they were afterwards called) each held a self-contained village or “manor” from a noble on condition that they followed him to war when he was called upon to fulfil his military obligations to the king. The base of the social pyramid was formed by the agricultural workers (afterwards known as “villeins”) who laboured on the land of knight or baron in return for the use of a number of strips in the manor fields. A legal doctrine had grown up that “every man must have a lord”—every man must “hold” of some greater man, who would be responsible for his good behaviour and the fulfilment of his duties. Otherwise he was an outlaw—outside the social system altogether.

When a “fief” was put in the possession of a feudal tenant or “vassal,” a solemn ceremony was performed. The ritual varied in detail, but the general custom was for the tenant to kneel at the feet of the lord, who was seated in his hall with his other vassals gathered round; the tenant then placed his two

hands in the hands of the lord and promised to be his man, saying, "I swear to be faithful and attached to you as a man should be to his lord," or some such formula. This was called "doing homage." The lord then gave the tenant "seisin"—some token of possession, such as a handful of earth from the estate. It became customary for a fief granted in this way to be held permanently by the heirs of the tenant so long as the obligations of service (which varied in detail in different countries and at different times) were duly performed.

Thus land was *held*, not *owned*; and the relationship of man to man had come to depend on the amount of land that an individual held, of whom he held it, and what sort of service he performed for it. And when kingdoms grew too large for the king to control every part of them, it was natural that a feudal lord should be given governmental authority over his tenants. Such an organisation of political power was utterly unlike anything that existed before or after; but the fact that it grew up spontaneously and simultaneously all over Western Europe shows that it arose naturally out of existing conditions. The system had not gone so far or taken such a definite form in England as it had done on the Continent; but even in England complete feudalisation was well on the way by the beginning of the eleventh century; and the process was greatly accelerated under Edward the Confessor, for the Normans who came over in such numbers during his reign were great exponents of feudal theory and practice.

### 39. *Noble, Yeoman, and Serf*

Several contemporary writings have come down to us which describe life in an English village just before the Conquest. Three or four distinct social grades had by this time developed. The "lord of the manor," as we should call him to-day, lived at the big hall surrounded by its park. It was his duty to go and fight for the king when called upon, and he was usually supported on these occasions by several members of his family or other men-at-arms in his household. He held "hall-moots"—petty sessions to maintain order, enforce local customs, and decide disputes among the tenants. Apart from these occa-



sional duties, he and his friends spent most of their days in hunting and their evenings in eating and drinking.

Living in a house near the church was the parson, who was maintained partly from the "glebe-land" with which the lord had endowed him, and partly from the "tithe"—the tenth part of the produce of the whole village community. He spent much of his time up at the hall, for he was still only half parish priest and half private chaplain to the lord.

Several of the villagers would be yeomen-farmers, the descendants of the "ceorls" of earlier days, who paid a rent (fixed by local custom) to the lord out of their crops. These were freemen, as were also the skilled workers such as the miller who did the grinding for the whole village in the lord's mill, the smith who made and mended farm implements and weapons, and the bailiff who supervised the tilling of the lord's lands and saw that he received his dues "in kind" from the tenants. Apart from the dues and duties which bound these freemen to their local lord, they had also to perform certain services for the king's government. These duties are sometimes called the *Trinoda Necessitas*. They included keeping the roads and forts in repair and fighting in the "fyrd" or national levy at times of national emergency.

The rest of the inhabitants were serfs, who could not leave the village or change their occupation without the lord's consent. Some of these were "cottagers" who received strips in the arable fields to a total area of about five acres in return for working on the lord's lands. "The cottar's duty," says one of our authorities, "is according to the custom of the village. Some must work all Monday all the year through for the lord, and three days a week in harvest; on some lands all days throughout August, and must mow an acre of oats a day, and he shall have his sheaf which the reeve or the lord's bailiff shall give him." Besides these farm-workers there were also bondmen, who had special tasks to perform for the lord, and received house-room, rations, and raiment in return. These included the bee-keeper (for honey was the only form of sugar in use), the swineherd, who looked after the herds of half-wild pigs in the surrounding woodlands, and woodwards, who had to keep the hall supplied with timber for building and logs for burning.

We can catch a glimpse of what the life was really like from a dialogue that was written early in the eleventh century: "What sayest thou, ploughman—how dost thou do thy work?" "O, my lord, hard do I work. I go out at daybreak, driving the oxen to the field, and I yoke them to the plough. Be it never so stark winter, I dare not linger at home for fear of my lord; but having yoked my oxen, and fastened share and coulter to the plough, every day must I plough a full acre or more." "Hast thou any comrade?" "I have a boy driving the oxen with a goad, who is hoarse with cold and shouting." "Dost thou aught more in the day?" "Aye, verily I do more. I must fill the mangers of the oxen with hay, and water them, and carry out the litter. Mighty hard work I have to do, because I am not free." The shepherd then gives an account of his day's work. "In the first of the morning I drive my sheep to their pasture and stand over them in heat and in cold with my dogs, lest the wolves swallow them up; and I lead them back to the fold, and milk them twice a day, and I move their folds and I make cheese and butter, and I am true to my lord."

#### 40. *Early English Literature*

One of the first signs that civilisation is dawning among a primitive people is that they begin to delight in poetry; and the first form that this delight takes is listening to some "bard" who knows the traditional stories of the race and chants them through, often embellishing them with details out of his own imagination as he goes along. Just as the Greek minstrel thus sang of the Wrath of Achilles at street corners in the sunshine, so the English minstrel sang in the great hall by the flickering firelight of the adventure of Beowulf with the Dragon. It was natural that such narratives should take the form of regular rhythm, for this is a valuable help to the memory when these stories are handed down from generation to generation, until writing is invented. Then some scribe collects them and gives them a regular form as an "epic poem." That is the history of the "Iliad," and of its English counterpart, "Beowulf." These poems belong to the same class of literature, in that both tell of stirring actions performed by heroic individuals, in

vigorous unrhymed verse ; but the "Beowulf" is an uncouth and clumsy piece of work compared with Homer's. It is a medley of legends, some half historical, some wholly fantastic, pieced together in the ninth century by a pious monk who made confusion worse confounded by trying to reconcile the pagan stories with Christian doctrines.

The only other important monument of Anglo-Saxon poetry is some Bible stories turned into verse—Genesis, Exodus, Daniel ; and a version of the Gospel in which the Apostles are represented as if they were thegns owing service to a feudal chief. These crude paraphrases are sometimes supposed to have been the work of a shepherd-poet named *Cædmon*, who lived in the monastery of Whitby about 650–680. Bede gives a brief account of his career together with a short sample of his poetry, which does not suggest that he reached very lofty heights of inspiration.

Prose is always a later development than poetry in the history of a nation's literature. Anglo-Saxon prose began with Alfred the Great, and its earliest examples were his translations from Latin (§ 24) and the famous "Chronicle" which he set going. None of these writings are what we should call "literature," nor was there any improvement in this respect after Alfred's day. On the contrary. Whereas Homer was followed by the stupendous outburst of Periclean Athens, when the greatest of dramatists, historians, and philosophers were contemporaries, Old English literature died away after the very crude beginnings which we have noticed. Politically and intellectually the race seemed stagnant ; it needed some violent stimulus from outside, some vital new element in its blood if it were ever to grow into a great nation. That stimulating element was being formed across the Channel.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *Describe some village that you know as you imagine it to have been in Anglo-Saxon times, writing as if you were yourself a member of the village community.*

(2) *Give an account of the origin and growth of Feudalism.*

## CHAPTER IX

# The Norman Conquest

(1066)

*It is not without good reason that 1066 is the best-known date in the History of England. In this chapter we shall trace the course of events which led to the Norman Conquest, and note the circumstances which made it so important an event in our national development.*

### 41. Normandy and its Duke

At the time of Edward the Confessor's death, Duke William of Normandy was thirty-eight years of age. When we trace his past career it seems as if fate had planned it expressly to fit him to play his part in this crisis. It had been a stern apprenticeship. His father, the fifth duke since Rollo (§ 27), had died when he was a mere child, and his boyhood had been passed in perpetual danger and difficulty. As he grew up he had not only to crush repeated rebellions amongst his nobles who sought to take advantages of his youth, but to resist the aggression of his overlord, the King of France, who was jealous of a vassal with dominions considerably greater than his own. But troubles which might have broken a weaker spirit merely hardened him into a man of iron will and irresistible energy. Long before the question of the English succession arose he had taught his feudal superior and inferiors to respect and fear him. He had made Normandy the best governed state in Europe, he had shown exceptional ability as a soldier, and he had given to Norman feudalism a distinctive character of its own. That character is worthy of some attention from us, for it was now to be transferred to England and intensified in the process.

In some respects feudal society was more highly developed

in Normandy than anywhere else. The rights and duties of every member of the community were exactly defined. As in other parts of France, each baron owed the service of a definite number of knights—five or some multiple of five, for convenience in organisation; each knight held a definite area of land as his “knight’s fee” from a baron; and all were liable for forty days’ military service to the overlord each year. But whereas most feudal princes had very little control over their tenants (and the Duke’s own suzerain, the King of France, was a case in point), William contrived to keep a firm grip on all the military and political affairs of the duchy. He sent out administrative officers of his own, called *vicecomites*, to every part of it, to hold law courts, to inspect the feudal levies, and to collect his revenues.

The last two or three dukes had been zealous supporters of the Church and had restored many of the ecclesiastical foundations destroyed by their heathen ancestors. William carried on this tradition and used his position as patron of the Church to keep in his own hands the right of appointing abbots and bishops. This enabled him to insist that they should hold their property on strictly feudal conditions—*i.e.* that they should provide knights to perform the military service for them, just as if the estates were held by laymen. The Normans had a genius for order and discipline, and their ecclesiastical organisation was a good example of this trait. They took up the Cluniac revival (§ 29) with enthusiasm, and the Abbey of Bec became one of the finest in Europe. Its abbot on the eve of the Conquest was a famous Italian scholar named *Lanfranc*, who became William’s closest friend and adviser.

#### 42. *Duke William States His Case*

When William heard that Harold had accepted the crown of England he professed to be as surprised as he was indignant. Yet it is difficult to see how he could have supposed that he had been wronged. He had not the faintest hereditary claim to the throne, except a distant relationship by marriage to the late king. True, Harold’s claim was no better, but Harold was at least an Englishman, and had long been king in all

but name. Or did the Duke expect Harold to step aside politely in his favour? If so, he knew little of human nature and even less of the laws and customs of the kingdom he was claiming. On the Continent kingship was already coming to be regarded as a right, to be enjoyed like any other; but in England the old idea still lingered that it was an office, to which a man (usually but not necessarily of blood royal) was called by the magnates of the realm. The Witan knew nothing of Harold's oath to William; and if it had known, it would have denied that such a transaction could tie its hands in choosing a king.

Of course, nobody knows what was in the Duke's mind, but there is reason to surmise that he beguiled Harold into taking that oath well knowing that he would not be able to keep it, so that this perjury should put him in the wrong in the eyes of Europe. For this sort of stratagem was considered quite fair in those days, when much more respect was paid to the letter of Church ceremonies than to the spirit of Christian charity. William regarded himself and was regarded by his contemporaries as a model of a Christian prince; and he was aided and advised all through by Lanfranc, one of the finest characters among the Churchmen of his time.

William at once sent to Harold to protest against the "usurpation." Then, on receiving the expected reply, he appealed to all the princes, potentates, and powers of Europe for moral and material support in an expedition to chastise a faithless feudal vassal who had seized his lord's inheritance, a perjured miscreant who had broken an oath sworn over the bones of a saint.\* This was the first time in history that such an appeal had been made—the first glimmering of the idea that there could be such a thing as international law. Something of the sort was absolutely necessary in William's case, for it was only by gaining voluntary support that he could raise a force large enough for his purpose. He could not by feudal law call up even his own barons and knights for more than forty days in the year, and this campaign was bound to last much longer than that. He could only carry out his scheme by making it a sort

\* The story went that Harold's oath to William was taken over an altar containing sacred relics, of which he was unaware until they were afterwards disclosed to him. That this trickery should be considered to make the oath specially binding gives us a glimpse of the peculiar religious ideas of the day.

of joint-stock enterprise, with the promise of lands and honours in the country that was to be conquered. Perhaps some of these volunteers deceived themselves into believing that they were performing a sacred duty ; but the plain truth is that it was a free-booting venture in which they were to get a share of the spoils.

Thus the spring and summer of 1066 were spent in collecting an army and making arrangements for its transport. It was mobilised at the mouth of the Somme, and included not only all the Norman barons with their knights and retainers, but also volunteers from the neighbouring states—Brittany, Maine, Anjou, and Flanders, with stray adventurers from Italy and Spain. Most important of all, a sacred banner and a hair of St. Peter arrived from Rome to give the expedition the air of being a crusade. William had been particularly anxious to win the approval of the Pope. His success in doing so was largely due to the fact that the dominant influence at Rome was *Hildebrand*, afterwards Pope Gregory VII, who was very glad of such an opportunity to gain recognition of papal supremacy over worldly as well as spiritual matters. Of this claim we shall have more to say hereafter, for it led to quarrels between Church and State which shook Christendom to its roots. But sufficient for the day was the evil thereof, in William's eyes.

43. "*It's an Ill Wind . . .*"

Elaborate as William's preparations were, it is very doubtful if he would have been successful had he not enjoyed the most remarkable piece of good fortune.

King Harold displayed exceptional gifts as a ruler from the very beginning of his short reign. With tireless energy he journeyed up and down the country. "He removed unjust laws and devised new ones, and made himself the patron of churches and monasteries," writes a chronicler of the next generation ; "he showed himself courteous and attentive to all good men, but a terror to evil-doers. He bade his earls, governors, and sheriffs arrest all who troubled the kingdom, and set himself to provide for the defence of the country by land and sea." It was this last consideration that was uppermost in his mind, we may be sure. He must have known from the

first what he had to expect, but definite news of William's preparations did not reach him until he was holding his Easter Gemot at Westminster. He knew that his enemy could not be ready for some months, and by midsummer he had gathered on the south coast a great force for the defence of the realm. The nucleus consisted of the "huscarles" and thegns of Wessex, together with a large proportion of the yeoman-farmers and their sons who formed the fyrd, or national levy. The first foe to appear was his own brother Tostig, whom he had driven into exile a few years before (§ 35). Tostig, thirsting for vengeance, had offered his services to William, but they must have been refused, for he now attacked Kent independently. Driven off by the approach of the English army, he sailed up to Scotland, where he was harboured by King Malcolm. In September another hostile fleet appeared off the east coast—that of *Harold Hardrada*, King of Norway. This other Harold was a famous warrior, whose mighty form (he was nearly seven feet tall) was known and feared all over Northern and Eastern Europe. The adventurous blood of his Viking ancestors had carried him down to Constantinople, where he commanded the Varangian Guard of the Emperor of the East, and to Nijni Novgorod, where he married the sister of the Russian king. He had waged successful war on Denmark, and he now came with 300 galleys to make himself master of England, like other famous Norsemen had done in the past. Tostig hastened to make common cause with his brother's foe, and the united fleets ran into the Humber. Edwin and Morcar, the brother earls of Mercia and Northumbria, made some attempt to resist the invasion, but were routed at *Fulford*, two miles south of York (September 20).

News of this disaster reached King Harold at a moment of considerable anxiety. Three months had passed since he had mobilised his army. It became increasingly difficult as time went on to feed such a large body of men, and he was now finding it impossible, with the approach of autumn, to prevent these amateur soldiers from going home to get in their crops. Moreover, the fleet which he had kept in readiness all through the summer in the Solent had to be sent round to London to refit. But as soon as he heard of the defeat of the earls to whom he had entrusted the defence of the northern province, he



instantly rushed northwards with his "huscarles," gathering what additional strength he could from the thegns of Wessex on the way. On September 25—not five days after the affair at Fulford—he appeared at the gates of York and crushingly defeated the invaders at the battle of *Stamford Bridge*, in which both Harold Hardraada and Tostig were slain.

Three days later William and his army landed at Pevensey. By an extraordinary piece of good luck northerly winds had prevented him from sailing until the moment when all opposition had been cleared from his path. Had he been able to set out when his expedition was first ready he would have been intercepted by a war-fleet ; and if he had succeeded in eluding that or beating it off, his landing would have been resisted by the strongest army that had assembled in England since the days of the Romans, in circumstances in which he would have been unable to make use of his greatest asset—the charge of his mounted warriors. Even if by a series of miracles he had overcome all these disadvantages he would have had to muster his battered forces a few weeks later to meet the invasion of Harold Hardraada. But, as events turned out, the wind did not veer round to the south until the last day of September ; and just at that juncture the English fleet was at London, while part of the English army was demobilised and the rest of it was with its king at the other end of England, where it had just exhausted itself by a forced march and a great battle which had cleared the Hardraada menace out of William's way.

#### 44. *Senlac Field*

The moment King Harold heard of William's landing he hurried back with such speed that he reached London on October 7. He had left instructions to Morcar and Edwin to follow at once with all the men they could raise ; and he now waited in London four days to collect reinforcements from the surrounding country. Then, as the levies were slow in coming in and there was no sign of the northern earls, he determined to delay no longer. His brother Gyrth urged him to play a waiting game and starve the Normans by laying waste the country round their camp at Hastings ; but Harold was not the man to

take long and calculating views. Moreover, he felt it his duty to defend his subjects, not to destroy their farms and crops ; and he was eager to get to grips with his adversary. Having taken part in a campaign under William, he knew that he would have to pit infantry against the charge of armoured horsemen ; for the English had never learnt the new Continental methods of fighting on horseback ; they merely used their horses to bring them quickly to the battlefield. He therefore drew up his men in a position where shock tactics would be at a disadvantage—along the top of Senlac Hill, which slopes gently southwards, just where the road from London emerged from the forest of the Andredsweald. William was as eager for battle as his enemy, and he at once advanced from Hastings, some eight miles away. In numbers the opposing forces were not ill-matched—there were about 12,000 on each side ; but in quality the Normans had a considerable advantage. Of the English host only the 2,000 huscarles could be considered professional fighting men ; apart from the thegns and their personal followers most of the rest were half-armed levies called up from the plough, whose only weapons were clumsy javelins. The Normans, on the other hand, included something like 5,000 barons and knights to whom war was the chief business in life ; while their foot-soldiers were experienced men-at-arms and included a fine body of archers. It was these last who turned the scale at the critical moment of the day.

The battle began with a flight of arrows from the Norman archers. Then infantry were sent up to try to make a breach in the rough palisade of stakes and shields which the English had thrown up in front of their position. When the footmen were beaten off the main attack was launched—the charge of the heavy-armed horsemen. William had drawn these up in a sort of geographical order, the Bretons on his left, his own vassals in the centre, and the French and Flemish volunteers on his right. After a long and fierce exchange of blows at the palisade the Bretons were forced back, and a great body of the undisciplined English shire-levies broke from their defensive position in pursuit, only to be themselves cut to pieces by a well-directed charge from the Norman centre. Having rallied his forces at the bottom of the hill, William sent them up for a

second attack, and another ferocious hand-to-hand conflict took place. This time the Duke ordered his right wing to give way, in the hope that the English would once more expose themselves to his counter-attack. His ruse was successful; and soon there was little left of the English army except the huscarles and thegns marshalled round their king and his standard in the centre. So stout was their defence that the result of the battle was still in doubt when William bethought him of trying the effect of his archers again. This time he ordered them to aim with a high trajectory so as to avoid the shield-wall, and almost at once King Harold was shot through the eye. In the warfare of those days much depended on the fate of the leaders. William himself had two horses killed under him that afternoon, and if one of the blows had killed rider instead of mount the whole course of English history would have been changed. When Harold fell, his cause fell with him. The Normans now succeeded in making a breach in the makeshift defences and poured through to take the English at a disadvantage. Thengs and huscarles died to a man round the body of their king, in accordance with the old Nordic tradition that no warrior can honourably return alive from a fight in which his leader has been slain.

William pitched his tent on the spot where earlier in the day the Dragon Flag of Wessex and Harold's own standard, "The Fighting Man," had been planted. He afterwards founded an abbey there, the ruins of which may still be seen, to commemorate the judgment of God which had given him the victory over his foe.

#### 45. *After the Battle*

The Norman casualties had been severe, and William was unable to leave the Sussex coast until reinforcements had arrived. Meanwhile his men were stricken with camp-fever, and a resolute renewal of resistance from the English during the next six weeks and more would have taken him at a great disadvantage. But the loyalty and fighting spirit of the thegns at Senlac had resulted in the death of almost every man of position in Wessex, and there was nobody to take the lead. At last, at the beginning of December, William began to move

towards London. Representatives from Winchester and from other towns in the south came to make their submission; but the remnants of the Witan gathered in London and chose *Edgar the Atheling*, the young grandson of Edmund Ironside, to succeed Harold as king. William would not make a direct attack on the city, however. Mere conquest was not his object; what he wanted was recognition of what he claimed was a lawful right bequeathed him by his relative. He knew that time was on his side. He had at least one secret supporter in London—Stigand, the English Archbishop of Canterbury (§ 34), who felt that his only chance of retaining his position would be to gain the favour of the victorious Duke; while the northern earls, who were now the most important members of the Witan, had shown by their previous slackness and treachery that they were not likely to be very active or resolute enemies. He therefore passed on up the Thames, laying waste the country as he went. Having crossed the river at Wallingford, he continued his great encircling movement until he reached Little Berkhamstead, and so cut off any chance of relief from the north. By this time the hearts of the magnates in London failed them. They came out to meet him, bringing with them the boy king, and made their submission. On Christmas Day *King William I* was crowned at Westminster.

The day was marked by an untoward but significant incident. When the congregation hailed the new king with the customary acclamation, the Norman guards outside supposed that the shout was hostile, and set fire to the buildings near in order to create a diversion. The congregation, alarmed in their turn, rushed out of the minster, leaving the king and the officiating clergy to finish off the ceremonies alone. The incident exposed the falseness of William's pretence that he was accepted as the lawful heir to the English throne. Any doubts as to the real relationship between him and his new subjects were speedily removed by what followed.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *Why did William of Normandy win the Battle of Hastings?*

(2) *Write a chronicle of the year 1066.*

## GENERAL QUESTIONS ON BOOK I

- (1) *Describe how the English counties came into existence.*
- (2) *What do you consider to be the most important event in English history during (a) the eighth, (b) the ninth, (c) the tenth centuries?*
- (3) *When and why did the Saxon Witan disregard hereditary claims in choosing a king?*
- (4) *Give an account of the administration of the law in Anglo-Saxon times.*
- (5) *By what stages was the Kingdom of England formed?*
- (6) *Illustrate the truth of the assertion that among the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms supremacy depended on the capacity of the individual king.*
- (7) *Trace in outline the history of the English Church from Augustine to Edward the Confessor.*
- (8) *Apart from Alfred, who do you consider the greatest figure of Anglo-Saxon times, and why?*
- (9) *How did the great earldoms of later Anglo-Saxon times prove a source of weakness to England?*
- (10) *What evidence is there for the statement that, "The Saxons were a people with a strong dislike of absolute government"?*
- (11) *Explain the importance of the battles of Deorham, Brunanburgh, Maldon.*
- (12) *Why was the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Roman Britain such a slow process?*
- (13) *Compare the process of conquest by the Anglo-Saxons with that afterwards carried through by the Danes.*
- (14) *Trace the steps by which the royal family of Wessex became the royal family of England.*
- (15) *What resemblances and differences are there between the system of government in Anglo-Saxon times and that which we have to-day?*

## CHAPTER X

### The Conqueror

(1066-1087)

*William the Conqueror was the first of three great English kings who by their exceptional vigour of character built up a powerful monarchy, and thereby saved the country from the worst of the evils which feudalism brought in its train elsewhere—the abuse of local independence by magnates, lay and clerical. The historical interest of his reign lies in the methods by which he counteracted these centrifugal tendencies.*

#### 46. *The Conquest Completed*

William's first business after his coronation was to reward the shareholders in his enterprise by parcelling out the conquered land amongst them. He always claimed to be a rightful king, and not a conqueror ; but he was compelled to confiscate property wholesale in order to satisfy these demands. His task was simplified, however, by the fact that almost all the landholders of the south-eastern shires had fallen fighting against him at Senlac. Their estates sufficed for a preliminary dividend.

By Easter, 1067, he felt sufficiently secure on his new throne to visit Normandy ; but to be on the safe side he took with him, nominally as guests but really as hostages, most of the leading Englishmen who might have made trouble behind his back—Edwin of Mercia, Morcar of Northumbria, Waltheof of Northampton, Edgar the Atheling, and Archbishop Stigand. But he had little to fear. The West Saxons had lost all their

local leaders, and there had never been any real cohesion between the different parts of the country.

This lack of unity was apparent in the revolts which broke out during the following year in Devonshire and Northumbria. The aim of these movements was not to expel the new king—it was obviously too late for that—but to claim some measure of local independence such as the provinces had preserved after the Danish conquest fifty years before. But William had very decided views on that subject: as in Normandy, so in England, he intended to be master everywhere. In the west the resistance was headed by the sons of Harold, who made their headquarters at Exeter. When the King marched down with an army of mercenaries the Exonians at first hardened their hearts and shut their gates; but after a siege of some weeks, their walls being already undermined, their discretion mastered their valour and they surrendered. William was, according to his usual custom, lenient when once he had gained the day; but a new crop of estates was harvested for the benefit of Norman barons. Harold's sons, with a number of other disinherited young Englishmen, became soldiers of fortune on the Continent; and there was a "Saxon Company" in the Varangian Guard at Constantinople centuries later, still preserving the speech and weapons of the fatherland they had never seen.

Then trouble broke out in the north. Edwin, Morcar, and Edgar the Atheling slipped away from the Court to put themselves at the head of the movement, and they were joined by Gospatric, an English noble to whom William had entrusted the defence of Northumbria against a threatened invasion from Denmark. William came up slowly through the east midlands, carving out estates for his supporters as he went, and making arrangements for the building of royal castles at all important points. His approach was quite enough for those deplorable persons, the "northern earls." They once more came and apologised, and were once more taken into contemptuous favour. Edgar and Gospatric fled to Scotland, and the revolt collapsed without a blow struck.

A year later Yorkshire was the scene of yet another disturbance. The long-expected Danes having arrived, they were supported by Gospatric and Edgar from Scotland, and by

Waltheof from central England. What these ill-assorted allies proposed to do with the country is not clear; but they were never called upon to settle that problem. They captured and burnt York, but once again the mere proximity of the dreaded Conqueror unnerved those who had taken arms against him. The Danes took to their ships, leaving their allies to make their peace as best they could. William received the penitents with his usual clemency; but he was determined that the north country should trouble him no more. He had the whole district laid waste from the Humber to the Tees, and so thoroughly were his orders obeyed that it remained a desert for centuries. The cruel injustice of thus destroying helpless countryfolk for the crime of leaders who had been taken back into royal favour is utterly indefensible; but it served its purpose. Then, by a fearful winter march the Conqueror pushed on into the only remaining fragment of Anglo-Saxon England, the borders of North Wales. Here again he "made a desert and called it peace," by a devastation which caused the death of thousands from exposure and starvation.

By the spring of 1070 the work begun at Senlac had been completed. William marched his army down to the fenced hill at Old Sarum, and there reviewed, rewarded, and dismissed it. One other English rebellion continued into the following year—the resistance of "Hereward the Wake" in the Isle of Ely amidst the Fenland marshes.) This sprang from resentment at the appointment of a Norman as Abbot of Peterborough; but the movement was purely local, and its collapse was inevitable when once the Normans seriously tackled the problem of throwing a causeway across the marsh.

#### 47. *Feudalism, Limited*

History books used to tell us that "William the Conqueror introduced the feudal system into England," but this is only partly true. The essential feature of feudalism—"rent by service"—had been developing here, as on the Continent, long before the Norman Conquest (§ 38), but it had grown up haphazard from natural causes, and the Anglo-Saxons had never deliberately *organised* it. The Normans, on the other hand,

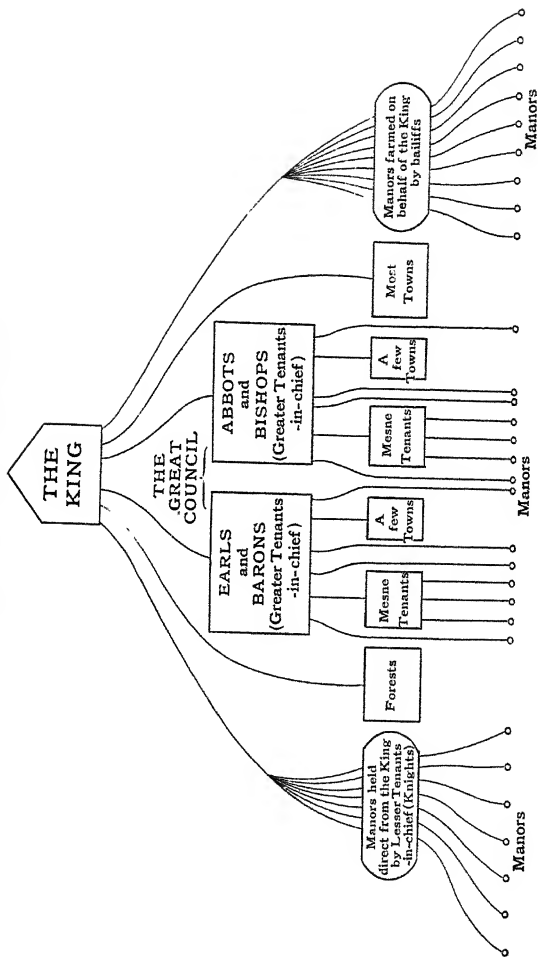


with their interest in jurisprudence (the science of law), had for the past hundred years been thinking out the theory of it ; and William now had a unique opportunity of putting the theory into practice. For instance, in the case of conquered England it was no mere legal fiction that the King was the supreme land-owner—it was a plain fact. The land had been forfeited by Harold and his thegns, and the victor could grant it to whom he pleased, on what terms he pleased. Moreover, he was able to insist upon other forms of social life, such as monasteries and towns, being brought within the feudal organisation.

In this sense, then, William did introduce feudalism ; but he took good care that it should not paralyse the royal power as it had done on the Continent. This was where his apprenticeship as Duke of Normandy came in useful, for it had given him practical experience of the system in two capacities—that of an unruly vassal who had made himself practically independent of his overlord, the King of France, and that of a masterful overlord who would allow as little as possible of independence to his own vassals. And whereas in Normandy he had had to wrestle with baronial powers that had already grown up, in England he was in a position to make a fair start and prevent their coming into existence.

If we examine his actions we shall see that he built up his power as king by four converging lines of policy. (1) He allowed only his personal friends and relatives to build castles for themselves ; but on the other hand he built a number of royal castles, such as the Tower of London, which were garrisoned by men in his own service, to keep the country in subjection. (2) Very few barons, however great their claims on him, were given solid blocks of territory—the 790 manors which he granted to his half-brother, Robert of Mortain, for instance, were situated in twenty different shires. This was due partly to the accident that the country was conquered piecemeal ; but the King can hardly have overlooked the fact that it would prevent the growth of anything like sovereign power. The only exceptions he made were the Earldoms of Chester, Shrewsbury, Durham, and Kent—all of them situated where the responsibility for guarding frontiers made it necessary to support considerable military forces ; and even these he took

# THE FEUDAL PYRAMID



care to entrust only to persons connected with himself, either by blood or marriage. (3) He took great pains to build up his revenue. That revenue was derived from various sources. He kept over a thousand of the richest manors in his own hands, to be cultivated in his interest by bailiffs; he exacted the last penny of the feudal incidents which were due to him from his "tenants-in-chief"—the barons and knights who held their lands directly from him;\* he brought the towns under the feudal system, and kept most of them directly under the Crown; he continued the collection of Danegeld; he kept a sharp eye on that part of the royal domain known as "the forests"—that is to say, the heath and woodlands which had not been carved into manors. (These were but sparsely populated, and were used chiefly for hunting, but in the aggregate their produce was of considerable value.) All these resources combined to make him one of the richest sovereigns in Christendom, and money was strength for a medieval king, inasmuch as it enabled him to hire fighting-men independently of the support of his feudal vassals. (4) He made great use of the "shire-reeves" or sheriffs (§ 36). Feudalism had become on the Continent a method of government and justice, and even in England William had to allow tenants to hold manor-courts, which carried out much of the business that had in Saxon times been entrusted to "hundred-moots"; but he counteracted this by making the sheriffs his personal representatives in much the same way as the *vicecomites* were in Normandy (§ 41). They collected the royal dues, presided in the king's name in the shire-courts, and saw that all who owed military service to the king were ready to fulfil it when called upon. Thus he made his authority felt in every part of the country; and though the sheriffs were usually barons themselves, they were dependent

\* These "dues" or "incidents" were among the features of feudalism which were now becoming fixed by custom. The chief of them were: (a) the "Aids"—contributions payable on the knighting of the lord's eldest son, on the marriage of his eldest daughter, and to ransom him if taken prisoner; (b) "Reliefs"—succession duties payable when an heir inherited an estate; and (c) "Wardship"—the lord's right to receive the income of a young heir's estate until he came of age. Some of these continued to be payable to the king long after the rest of the feudal system had disappeared, and were only exchanged for a fixed income from taxation at the accession of Charles II in 1660.

on the king for privileges and powers which they valued very highly.

#### 48. *Baronial Unrest*

Naturally, the nobles resented these restrictions, and in the last dozen years of the Conqueror's reign he was threatened more than once with rebellion. But by this time his mastery over his kingdom was so complete that in repressing these movements he was supported by the English themselves, for the latter realised that, harshly as he often treated them, his power was their only safeguard against the far worse oppression of individual magnates.

The first of these baronial conspiracies occurred in 1075, when two Norman nobles of the younger generation, the Earls of Hereford and Norfolk, persuaded Waltheof, the English Earl of Northampton, to join them in a mad scheme to divide England into three independent dukedoms. Waltheof quickly repented of his share in the plot, and gave information of it to Archbishop Lanfranc, who was acting as regent while the King was on a visit to Normandy. Naturally, very few people, either Norman or English, wanted to exchange the rule of William for that of these irresponsible young men, and they got no support beyond their own feudal retainers. The whole thing collapsed ignominiously. Norfolk fled abroad, Hereford was imprisoned for life, and Waltheof was beheaded, despite the fact that he had turned "informer."

Some years later an equally futile movement was started by the King's own half-brother, Bishop Odo of Bayeux. Like other men of his class, he had taken Holy Orders mainly to qualify for the revenues of a bishopric, and there was little of the churchman about his ideas or actions. An ambitious, bellicose, turbulent person, he had laid about him in the thick of the fight at Senlac with a mace instead of a sword, because the Church did not allow a "priest" to shed blood! He had been made Earl of Kent; but he was dissatisfied with this rank and was jealous because his brother had made Lanfranc his chief counsellor. In 1082 he joined with several other discontented nobles in a plan to raise troops in England and seek fortune in Continental wars. William at once put a stop to this, charged

his brother with disaffection, and imprisoned him for the rest of the reign. By this drastic treatment of a member of his own family he convinced the other barons that they could take no liberties with him, and they rebelled no more.

#### 49. *The Conqueror and the Church*

Just at this time the Papacy was approaching the zenith of its spiritual power. The master mind in this development was a monk named *Hildebrand*, one of the most striking figures in the whole of medieval history. His point of view was clear and logical; since the Church embodied the will of God it ought to rule every aspect of human life, worldly as well as religious; and since the Popes were the divinely appointed heads of the Church they ought to have authority over all kings and princes. To make the Church worthy of this great task, her clergy must be properly organised and disciplined, and must live "unspotted from the world." Hildebrand inspired several successive Popes with his high ideals and fiery vigour, and eventually became Pope himself as Gregory VII (1073-1085).

He had influenced Pope Alexander II to support the Norman Conquest because he hoped that this would be the means of bringing England within the scope of his great movement. And the condition of the English clergy certainly called for something of the sort. The effect of Dunstan's reforms (§ 29) had long since died out. Many priests were married and lived lives hardly to be distinguished from those of laymen; the standard of education among them was so low that they hardly understood the Latin of their missals; and so completely had they lost touch with Rome that Stigand (§ 34) had been their archbishop for ten years without the sanction of the Pope. William had promised to alter all this when he asked for the papal blessing on the Conquest. He was a man of his word, especially in religious matters, and from the beginning of his reign he appointed able Norman clerics to English bishoprics and abbacies with the express duty of bringing the Church into line with the reforms that were now in full swing on the Continent.

At first he left Stigand alone, for he wanted his support in settling the country; but in 1070 a Church Council at Win-

chester, which included three representatives of the Pope, declared the archbishopric vacant. William was now able to place the direction of the reform-movement in the hands of one of the ablest Churchmen of the day. *Lanfranc* was an Italian who had already made a name as scholar, teacher, and organiser in control of Norman abbeys at Bec and Caen. He was now, comparatively late in life, called to a wider sphere of activity, and showed himself an ecclesiastical statesman of the highest capacity. He enforced the celibacy of the clergy, though with characteristic moderation he allowed such parish priests as already had wives to keep them. He made the Archbishopric of Canterbury definitely supreme over that of York. He reformed monasteries, reorganised bishoprics, started schools. Most important of all, the Church law-courts were given a separate existence. Hitherto, bishops and sheriffs had presided jointly over the shire-courts; henceforth the bishops were to sit in courts of their own to deal with spiritual cases, such as marriages and wills and breaches of the moral law. A similar distinction was made at the triennial meetings of the tenants-in-chief, which had replaced the old Witan. The bishops and abbots took part in the general assembly as land-holders, but they also met in a synod of their own to discuss (usually in the presence of the king) all purely ecclesiastical affairs.

In all these changes William and his archbishop acted in hearty accordance with successive Popes; but still the latter were not satisfied. They desired William to do homage to them for the kingdom which he had won through papal support, and claimed the right to nominate English bishops. We know enough of William's character and outlook to anticipate that he would not be likely to give way on such points as these. He politely but firmly denied that the Pope had any claim to suzerainty over him, and he quietly went on appointing his own prelates. He would not even allow papal "bulls" (*i.e.* official communications to the clergy) to be received without his express sanction. The Popes were disappointed but discreet. They understood the man with whom they had to deal; and they had the less reason for provoking a quarrel as William, acting under the influence of Lanfranc, generally exercised the disputed powers with wisdom and moderation.

50. *A Great Ruler*

The Conqueror made no great mark as a law-giver. His chief legislative innovation was a special Forest Law to preserve the game in his forests. It was only during the last generation or two that hunting had become the privilege of the upper classes, and it seemed a great hardship to English peasants that they should be savagely punished for killing animals for food ; but they had to put up with it, and so had their descendants for centuries to come.\* The creation of the New Forest as an appendage to the royal residence at Winchester was another great grievance. The English chroniclers tell of sixty villages destroyed and thousands of acres of farm-land laid waste, but there must be a good deal of exaggeration about this—the soil in those parts can never have been very fertile.

But William's greatness lay mainly in his capacity as a practical ruler. We have seen one example of this in the use he made of the sheriffs, which gave him and his successors far more control over the administration than any of their Continental contemporaries could exercise. Another instance was the famous *Oath of Salisbury* (1086). An attack from Denmark being threatened, the King summoned every land-holder, great and small, English and Norman, to meet him at Salisbury and there swear to uphold him against all his enemies, domestic or foreign. This was not a deliberate constitutional innovation, as some have supposed ; it was a mere measure of precaution, designed to ensure that all manor-holders realised the paramount importance of their duty towards himself, whether they held their land direct or through some great tenant-in-chief. Equally practical was the purpose of the *Domesday Survey*, made at about the same time. This was a methodical "inquest" or inquiry into the value of every estate in the realm. Commissioners were sent round to each manor to address a string of questions to a sworn jury which comprised the local lord, the priest, the reeve, and six villeins. "What is the name of this

\* The last trace of the Game Laws did not disappear until the passing of the Ground Game Act of 1880, which gave people of whatever rank the right to kill hares and rabbits on the lands they tenanted.

manor? Who held it in the time of King Edward? Who holds it now? How many hides does it contain? How many ploughs are there on the lord's demesne, and how many belong to the tenants? How many villeins, slaves, freeholders are there? How much pasture? How many mills and fishponds? What was the value of it in King Edward's time? What is the value of it to-day? Could more be got out of it?" and so on. The inquiry was decided on at the Christmas Council of 1085, and was carried out in the course of the following summer. When all the returns had been sent in, they were arranged systematically and deposited in the chapel of *Domus Dei* at Winchester, whence the name of the book. This exact account of the resources of the manors was required primarily to help the collection of Danegeld. Like the Oath of Salisbury, it was an example of William's main characteristics as a ruler—his grip on the practical details of government and his insistence on the duties of his subjects towards himself.

(During the last few years of his reign he was disturbed by several rebellions in Normandy, some of which were abetted by his undutiful son Robert, who was angry that he was not given independent rule there.) It was in one of these that he eventually met his death. He had punished the citizens of Mantes by burning their city to the ground, when his horse plunged on the hot ashes, and he received injuries from which he died a few weeks later.

A stern and exacting ruler, a better Churchman than he was a Christian, William the Norman was not a very pleasant person to have dealings with, and it was said that Lanfranc was the only man whom he called friend. But no king ever made a greater mark on English history. His conquest added a new and potent ingredient to the nation's blood and brought the country into the main stream of Continental development, political, social, and ecclesiastical; while his masterful character laid the foundation of a powerful monarchy centuries before any Continental country enjoyed such an advantage.



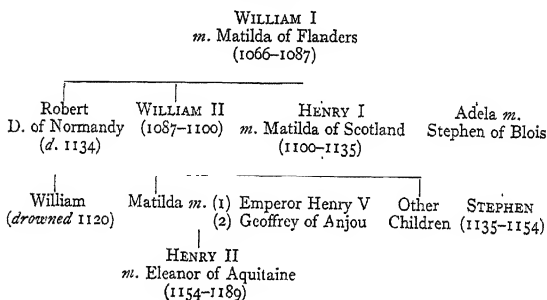
## QUESTIONS

- (1) "*The evil that men do lives after them ;  
The good is oft interred with their bones.*"

*Is this true of William the Conqueror ?*

- (2) *How far is it true to say that the Norman Conquest led to the introduction of feudalism into this country ?*

## THE NORMAN KINGS



## CHAPTER XI

### The Conqueror's Sons

(1087-1135)

*The two sons of William the Conqueror who became kings of England were as dissimilar in character as brothers could well be ; but they both inherited their father's egoistic determination to be master in his own house. In consolidating the royal power they were (albeit unconsciously) working for the good of the country by saving it from the evils of feudal anarchy, while Henry, the younger of the two, laid the foundation of English law.*

#### 51. William the Red-Faced

William the Conqueror had three sons. To the eldest, Robert, he bequeathed Normandy ; to the second, William, the constant companion of his later years, he assigned England, while the third, Henry, received a legacy of £5,000.\*

The new king was a thickset man with a red face which gained him the nickname of "Rufus." He quite lacked his father's touch of high purpose, was far more the slave of his own evil passions, and paid far less regard to the outward decencies of morality and religion. But he was a man of considerable energy and capacity, and he inherited the greatest of all merits in a King of England at that epoch—a ruthless determination to keep down opposition. For this purpose he had to maintain a band of knights in his pay, and he made his reign memorable by the rapacity with which he wrung money

\* In estimating the value of money in the Middle Ages we may reckon that a shilling then would purchase about as much as 25s. now ; but coin was so scarce that the possession of such a sum as £5,000 gave a man an importance that would be given by a quarter of a million to-day.

out of his subjects for the support of the military adventurers who flocked to his court from all parts of Europe. They were a lawless set of ruffians, and we are told that whenever they and their master journeyed about the kingdom the inhabitants fled to the woods at their approach ; but even this was not too high a price to pay for immunity from the sanguinary chaos of private warfare that afflicted feudal Europe.

One new danger to peace and quiet arose from the Conqueror's deathbed disposition of his dominions. Almost every important tenant-in-chief held lands on both sides of the Channel, and now that England and Normandy were no longer under the same ruler they owed allegiance to two different overlords. It was but natural that the barons, jealous for their own independence, should try to play off the two brothers against each other. In the second year of the reign a feudal rebellion broke out under Bishop Odo (§ 48), who had been released from prison on the accession of his nephew. The malcontents felt that Duke Robert would be a much more tractable king than William, for he was a good-natured, easy-going prince, who made no attempt to keep his tenants in order. Rufus appealed to his English subjects for support, offering them all sorts of boons—even the repeal of the Forest Laws. Whether the English were deceived or not by these false promises, they rallied round him, for they knew that anything was better than to be at the mercy of lawless barons. Robert was prevented from landing by the "fyrd" of Sussex, while Odo was besieged in Rochester Castle, captured, and exiled to Normandy, where he continued to be the evil genius of his eldest nephew. This was the only serious internal disturbance during the whole reign ; but the position was bound to make bad blood between the brothers, and William made several attempts to oust Robert from Normandy, by force or by guile.

Most of the expedients which he adopted for raising revenue were devised by a Norman priest named *Ranulf Flambard*. Flambard did not try to impose new forms of taxation. He merely pushed existing feudal rights to the harshest extreme, demanding special "aids" and extravagant "reliefs" and abusing the right of "wardship" ; while judgments were sold in the law-courts and the Domesday Book was used to extort the utter-

most farthing of Danegeld. But the most profitable device of all was to leave bishoprics and abbacies vacant and divert the income into the royal exchequer. On the death of Lanfranc in 1089 the richest of all these offices, the archbishopric of Canterbury, fell vacant. Year after year passed without an appointment being made. The other bishops were unable to take any official action, for there was no primate to call them together. They brought over a cleric named *Anselm*, the most famous scholar in Europe, who had succeeded Lanfranc as Abbot of Bec and was admitted by all to be a most suitable man to succeed him at Canterbury; but William took no notice and blasphemed with characteristic violence whenever anybody mentioned the subject to him.

Then, in 1093 he fell sick, and seemed likely to die. In terror of hell-fire he vowed that if his life were spared he would appoint Anselm and rob the Church no more. He recovered and kept his word (so far as the archbishopric was concerned); but the appointment led to a dispute which brought in question the whole relationship between Church and State.

## 52. *The Hildebrandine Church versus The Norman Monarchy*

The papal claims which we always associate with the name of Hildebrand (§ 49) had recently led to the great *Investiture Contest* between Empire and Papacy. The dispute arose over the exaction of feudal dues and military service from ecclesiastical lands. The Popes maintained that the Church held her property in trust for the furtherance of her divine work, not for the support of bloodshed. Moreover, if kings could nominate whom they chose to bishoprics and abbacies, they would sell them to unworthy men at the price of extravagant "reliefs." These appointments must therefore be in the hands of the Church, and lay princes must not even be allowed to "invest" the prelates with staff and ring, the symbols of the sacred office. Of course, the princes looked at the matter from an entirely different angle. A great proportion of their dominions was held by the Church; they could not be expected

to give up all right to the feudal income therefrom and all voice in the nomination of those who were to wield such power among their subjects. In the furious quarrel between Pope Gregory VII and the Emperor Henry IV fortunes had fluctuated. Henry had been compelled to stand in the snow at Canossa, waiting for a chance to apologise to the Pope, but had afterwards driven Gregory himself into exile ; and still the problem was unsettled.

It had never been acute in England so long as the Conqueror was king and Lanfranc archbishop, for neither of these men was a fanatic, and both were statesmen. But the situation was very different in 1093. Rufus was a defiant and blaspheming atheist so long as he was in good health, while Anselm was a simple-minded saint, to whom his sacred calling was everything. He had been very unwilling to accept the archbishopric, for he realised that his nature and training quite unfitted him for its duties—as he himself said, in dealing with Rufus he would be like an old sheep tied up to a mad bull. Yet, once installed, his faith gave him inexhaustible courage and firmness. There was none of Lanfranc's compromising statesmanship about him. Despite the King's frenzies of wrath he insisted on the return of every penny that had been misappropriated while the archbishopric was vacant, and he refused to collect an aid to support William's Norman war, especially as his tenants had been impoverished by three years of Flambard's exactions. Nor would he even permit the King to invest him with the *pallium*—the symbol of consecration from the Pope—lest this should seem an admission that he owed his office to royal authority. For five years the quarrel went on. Anselm got little support from the higher clergy, who sided with the master who had given them their mitres, but his opposition to the king's rapacity made him very popular with those who suffered most from it—the parish clergy and the common people. At last, in 1097, he went to Rome to appeal to the Pope, and did not return for the rest of the reign.

### 53. *The First Crusade*

In 1095 the Pope held a Council at Clermont, at which some decisions vital to the future of Christendom were taken.

First, the opposition to lay investitures was henceforth to be carried so far that princes were not even to be asked for a formal approval of the prelates chosen by Pope or elected by Chapter; secondly, a crusade was authorised for the recovery of Palestine from the Turks.

The expectation that the world would come to an end a thousand years after the birth of Christ had impelled great numbers to expiate their sins by going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the practice had continued even after these predictions had been falsified. At first the pilgrims had been well treated by the Arabs of Palestine, who had settled down after the first enthusiasm of the Moslem conquest (§ 19) into peaceful and tolerant folk; but about the middle of the century the country was overrun by fierce and fanatical Turks who destroyed the Holy Sepulchre and made the whole neighbourhood unsafe for Christians. The Eastern Emperor ruling at Constantinople sent to the Pope for help, but Hildebrand was too pre-occupied with the struggle about investitures to be able to respond. When the appeal was renewed in 1094, however, Pope Urban II, who was more of a practical politician, realised (*a*) that this was a golden opportunity for extending the papal power to the Eastern Church, and (*b*) that by himself organising a united effort to win back the Holy Places from Moslem control he would cripple the prestige of the Emperors who had hitherto posed as the militant leaders of Christendom.

Great stir had already been made amongst the lower classes by the preaching of one Peter the Hermit, who went about with a great wooden cross, depicting in lurid language the sufferings of pilgrims, and exhorting all men to drop their worldly avocations and rush to the service of their faith. The same idea was addressed to kings and princes at the Council of Clermont by Pope Urban in his epoch-making sermon on the text, "He that will not take up his cross and follow me, the same is not my disciple."

Europe was thrown into a ferment of excitement. A great moment had come in the development of Europe: men of all classes and countries now realised for the first time that they were united by their common faith. And never before in World

History had such masses of humanity been moved by an unselfish and spiritual ideal. To be sure, there was a good deal of baser metal mixed with the gold of this idealism—mere fear that the Turks would, if unchecked, attack Europe; eagerness to re-open the high-road of trade with the East; and the ambition of younger sons of baronial families to win fiefs for themselves in Palestine. Yet the mainspring of the movement was undoubtedly religious enthusiasm.

*The First Crusade* touches English history chiefly through the fact that Duke Robert of Normandy pawned his duchy to William II in return for a loan with which to equip himself for the expedition. Rufus eagerly seized his chance, doubtless hoping in his heart that his brother would never come back to redeem the pledge. Meanwhile, the unfortunate English people were forced to provide the money by means of extortionate demands for Danegeld and special aids.

The vanguard of the great eastward movement consisted of great bands of simple folk who set out down the Danube, almost leaderless and only half-armed, until they reached Hungary, where they fell out with the inhabitants and were massacred almost to a man. Another of these unorganised mobs reached Constantinople, but was cut to pieces by the Turks as soon as it set foot in Asia Minor. The organised forces of the Crusade followed in 1097, making their way by various routes, under the command, for the most part, of great French vassal princes, such as Godfrey of Bouillon, Raymond of Toulouse, Stephen of Blois, and Robert of Normandy. They captured Nicea in 1097, and Antioch in the following year; but as they drew near to Jerusalem angry disputes broke out as to the possession of the conquered territory. Eventually they stormed the Holy City itself and made it the capital of a feudal monarchy with Antioch, Edessa, and Tripolis as vassal states.

#### 54. "*Henry the Educated*"

William Rufus was killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest. The only witness of his death, one Walter Tyrell, fled abroad for fear of being charged with the murder, but he

always protested his innocence. Probably the deed was done by some poacher who had suffered under the Forest Laws, for the second William was even harsher in this matter than the first had been.

Rufus had no children, and Robert of Normandy was still away on Crusade. The youngest of the brothers, *Henry*, who was hunting in another part of the forest at the time, galloped off at once to Winchester; for there was still no fixed law of succession, and possession of the royal treasure which was kept there would be a strong argument in his favour. He gained recognition as king from such magnates as chanced to be in the neighbourhood, and was crowned three days later at Westminster. He hastened to confirm his position by three politic acts. Firstly, he issued a charter in which he promised to make an end of all the late king's malpractices—there was to be no more abuse of feudal rights and no more embezzlement of Church revenues. Secondly, he threw Flambard into prison. Thirdly, he married a princess of the old royal house of Wessex. True, none of these concessions was worth very much; for he afterwards broke almost every clause of the charter, he restored Flambard a year later to his bishopric of Durham, and his Queen turned out to be a nonentity who never had the least influence on his policy.

Yet on the whole he was a good king for England, for, while he was nearly as greedy and unscrupulous as his brother, he was even more efficient in upholding the power of the monarchy. He was much better educated than most laymen of that day (whence his "surname" of "Beauclerc"), and had all the Norman talent for law and systematic administration. In his methods of government he showed far more respect for the formal legality than William had ever done, and was much more of a calculating and self-controlled statesman. Thus, in pursuing much the same objects as his brother, he was a good deal more successful. He gained unquestioned authority over the nobles; he added Normandy definitely to his dominions; and in the dispute over investitures he won a complete victory, in fact if not in outward form.



55. " *The Lion of Justice* "

Let us see how "The Lion of Justice," as a contemporary chronicler calls him, dealt with these three problems.

To keep the barons in check he developed both the shire-courts and the Royal Council. We have seen how the Conqueror had adopted the sheriff system and had adapted it to his purposes (§ 47); Henry I extended the powers of the sheriffs and caused all serious cases to be brought before them in the shire-courts instead of in the local courts of the barons. Moreover, he contrived that they should always be in touch with the *Curia Regis*. The shaping of this last institution was Henry's chief contribution to the machinery of government. The place of the Anglo-Saxon Witan had been taken after the Conquest by the Great Council, which consisted of such nobles and prelates as were within reach of the place where the King happened to be holding his court. It was a general custom for feudal sovereigns thus to meet their tenants-in-chief periodically, but for the most part these magnates were self-centred persons who knew little and cared less about the affairs of the country as a whole, and the Norman kings kept up the practice of summoning them rather to keep an eye on them than to consult them. But Henry required professional assistance for that efficient control of the government at which he aimed, and he therefore formed a little group of specialists in the various departments of state, who travelled about with him, understood his general policy, and could carry it into effect in a regular and methodical way. Chief of these officers were the Justiciar, the Treasurer, and the Chancellor. The men chosen for these posts were all clerics who could be rewarded by preferment in the Church, the most famous of them being Roger, Bishop of Salisbury. This little inner circle of permanent councillors was known as the *Curia Regis*. One of its duties was to settle disputes between the tenants-in-chief, and it also met the sheriffs twice a year at Winchester to receive the king's dues and to audit accounts. Thus, it was the germ out of which grew both the Courts of Justice and the Court of Exchequer. Of course, the barons resented the tight hand thus kept over them, and they made more than one attempt to resist

it ; but the power concentrated in the King's hands grew greater every year, and none of their movements came to anything.

As to Normandy, the astute Henry had little difficulty in getting the better of his soldierly but simple eldest brother. As soon as Robert got back from Palestine<sup>7</sup> he began a belated attempt to claim the English throne. At first the situation was doubtful, for many of the Norman barons would have preferred him to the grasping Henry as their overlord. But the English were staunch to the king who had made such fair promises and had married their princess. Robert landed at Portsmouth with a feudal array and marched towards London ; but when he came into contact with Henry's forces at Alton he was induced to negotiate—with the natural result that he was completely outwitted. He consented to retire in consideration of a pension of £3,000 and a promise of help in subduing the province of Maine, which had rebelled against him. This was a poor return for giving up a claim to a kingdom, but low as the price was, it was never paid. The divided allegiance of the barons caused continual friction, and the situation soon became impossible. At last war was declared. Henry crossed the Channel with an army, of which the foot-soldiers consisted mainly of Englishmen. So much greater were his resources than those of his brother that the issue could not long be in doubt. It was fought out under the walls of *Tinchebrai* (1106), where Henry won a complete victory after less than an hour of actual fighting. The Duke was captured and kept in honourable confinement in England for the rest of his life, while Henry was now able to give Normandy what it had lacked since the death of the Conqueror—firm government and a respite from private war.

The third of Henry's chief tasks was to settle the investiture question. Anselm returned to England at the beginning of the reign, but at first the deadlock was as complete as before, for the archbishop had been won over to the papal point of view more completely than ever during his exile. To the surprise of everybody he now refused to render to Henry even the homage which he had rendered without question to William—homage, that is to say, for the estates which supported the archbishopric. He declared that while he had no personal objection to the

ceremony, he felt bound to obey the ruling of the Pope on the subject. But Henry I was not the man to surrender any of the powers held by his father and brother. After three years of fruitless negotiation, Anselm willingly fell in with Henry's suggestion that he should go to Rome and make a personal effort to induce the Pope to allow him to do homage. For a long time Pope Paschal would not budge an inch, and as the archbishop felt that it would be useless for him to return with the question unsettled, he remained abroad. At last, in 1106, a compromise was arranged. The King agreed to give up the claim to invest prelates with ring and crozier on condition that they did homage to him as territorial tenants-in-chief. In actual practice the settlement proved to be altogether in the King's favour, for he was still able to influence the cathedral and abbey chapters to elect his candidates. And our respect for Henry's statecraft increases when we find that the Concordat of Worms, which fifteen years later settled the more famous dispute between Papacy and Empire, was based on very much the same terms.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *Write a short life of St. Anselm.*
- (2) *How far did William II and Henry I carry on the policy of their father?*

Yet it was not long before *Stephen* found himself in difficulties. He may have been "a very parfit gentil knight," but he had no conception of the duties and responsibilities of kingship. To secure his election he cheerfully surrendered the strong position which his predecessors had won for the monarchy. He submitted to claims from the Church which made it almost independent of the Crown; to claims from the barons which robbed the State of all control over them; to claims from the King of Scotland which involved the loss of Cumberland. And worse was to follow this very inauspicious beginning. Geoffrey of Anjou began a series of attacks on Normandy and conquered it piecemeal; while David of Scotland demanded the cession of Northumberland as an appanage for his son, and invaded England to secure it. True, the Scots were defeated at the *Battle of the Standard* (1138), fought near Northallerton; but in the negotiations which followed Stephen conceded nearly all their demands and accepted the River Wear as the northern limit of England.

Nor was even this the worst. The King's prestige had been so seriously shaken by these humiliations that in 1139 the ex-Empress came across from France to claim her birthright by force of arms. At the moment of her landing Stephen could have captured her without a blow; but he declined to take advantage of a lady and gave her a safe-conduct to join her chief partisan, the Earl of Gloucester. The result of this piece of quixotic chivalry was fourteen years of the most frightful misery for the English people.

For a War of Succession followed in which Matilda and Stephen tried to outbid each other for the support of the nobles. Stephen created eight new earldoms, and endowed them with lands which had hitherto been a precious source of strength to the Crown, together with rights of jurisdiction and administration which made them practically independent. Matilda followed suit with six earldoms carved on similar terms out of the western shires where her party was strongest. And these nobles never showed the least gratitude or loyalty, but betrayed each side in turn when they thought they could get better terms from the other. The most famous of them was Geoffrey de Mandeville, who seemed to his contemporaries the fine flower

of chivalry, but to our eyes looks more like a bloodthirsty brigand.

England now had a taste of Continental feudalism. Might became right. Earls and barons fought each other with the aid of foreign mercenaries who laid the country waste in every direction. They raised private armies, they built strongholds, they coined money, they extorted tribute from peaceable citizens with unspeakable tortures. After a year or two the devastation was such that no more crops were sown; men, women, and children died in thousands of exposure and starvation.

Meanwhile, the King, whose duty it was to give his people the blessings of good government, was rushing about the country like a bull in a bull-ring, dashing first at this castle and then at that, without achieving anything at all. He was taken prisoner at Lincoln (1141), and it seemed for the moment as if Matilda had triumphed; but she soon disgusted everybody by her vindictiveness and arrogance. When her chief supporter, Robert of Gloucester, was captured in the following year, she was compelled to exchange Stephen for him, and the whole wretched business began again.

But after 1148 there came a lull. *The Second Crusade* (1147), preached by St. Bernard and led by the Emperor Conrad III and King Louis VII of France, drew off some of the partisans of both sides, and, the Count of Anjou having completed the conquest of Normandy, Matilda rejoined him there and troubled England no more. In the following year her husband died, and their son Henry became Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou, as well as heir to Matilda's claim to the English throne. Not long afterwards, this astute young man married Eleanor of Aquitaine, a woman fourteen years older than himself and the divorced wife of the Louis VII, who brought him as dowry two-thirds of what is now France. When in 1153 he crossed the Channel to renew the struggle for his mother's inheritance, these great resources, coupled with his own inborn capacity in warfare, made him irresistible. The war-worn King Stephen, now sixty-six years old, lost heart; and the death of his only son at this time suggested a compromise satisfactory to both parties. By the *Treaty of Winchester* (1153) Stephen was to

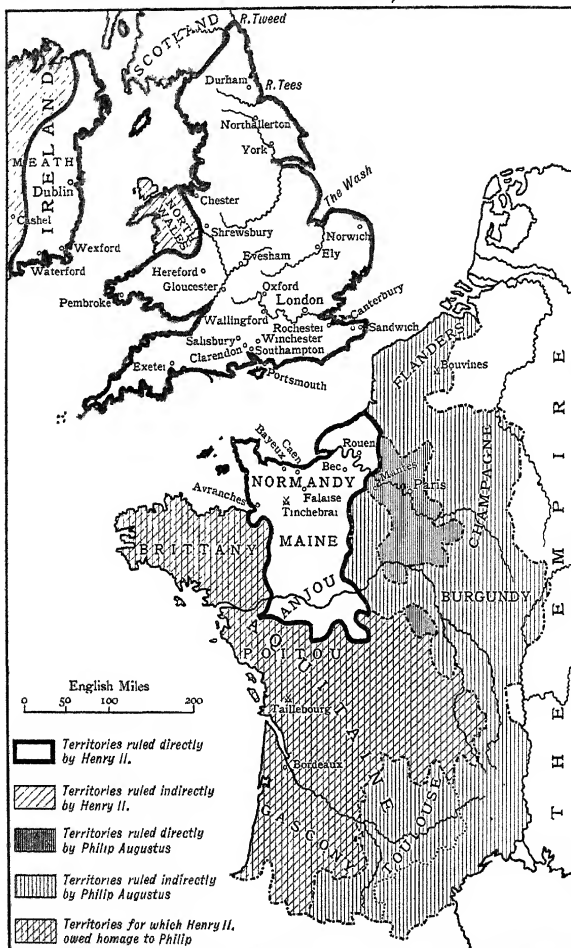
be left unmolested till his death, when he was to be succeeded by Henry. Barely a year later the finest gentleman but the worst king that ever sat on the English throne died, leaving the country ready for any sort of government that would prevent a return to feudal "liberty."

### 57. *Henry of Anjou*

If England was unlucky in having a King Stephen, she had compensation in his successor, for no king could have been better fitted by temperament, training, and political position to undo the evils of the Great Anarchy than *Henry II.*

Contemporary writers enable us to form a more vivid picture of him than of any other of our medieval kings, and it is a very interesting human figure that they depict. He was a young man of twenty-one when he became king, with close-cut, reddish hair, freckled face, and flashing grey eyes. His physique was of the bull-dog type, and he carried himself like one who is constantly in the saddle—as indeed he was, for every minute of the day that he could spare from business he devoted to hunting, and he rarely spent more than a few nights under the same roof. Even when darkness made outdoor activities impossible he could not keep still, but paced restlessly up and down, or busied himself with his hunting-tackle. And his mind was as active as his body. He had picked up a working knowledge of most European languages and had a good grasp of the legal science which was just then taking shape in Italy and France. He was always ready to discuss problems of government, even on horseback in the middle of a hunt, always alert to pick the brains of any wise or learned person with whom he came in contact. He had already served an apprenticeship to the arts of the ruler in his Continental dominions, and he enjoyed intensely his *métier* of kingship—not for its outward trappings, for no man could be more indifferent to food and drink, fine clothes and elaborate ceremonial, but for the exercise of power. He had the born ruler's gift of never forgetting a face he had once seen, or a fact which had once attracted his attention. He was easy of approach, good-humoured with troublesome petitioners and the like, and loyal to his friends.

# THE ANGEVIN EMPIRE, circa 1185



His inexhaustible energy and imperious will often brought him into conflict with people. He was always magnanimous when he had gained his point, but if he were crossed he was liable to paroxysms of rage that amounted almost to insanity; he would make inarticulate cries and tear his hair and roll on the floor, gnashing at the rushes that in those days did duty for carpet.

### 58. *King and Chancellor*

Such was the man who now took up the task of re-building the fabric of English government out of the shattered ruins left by his predecessor. He had a great asset in the fact that his Continental possessions made him one of the most powerful princes in Christendom. A map of his empire might make one think that western France was an "English Possession"; but this would be a misleading point of view. Henry II was not an Englishman by birth, speech, or training, and of the thirty-five years of his reign he spent barely three on this side of the Channel. Of course, he would have put England first among his dominions, because in England he was a king, whereas on the Continent he was merely a duke or a count owing homage to the King of France. But his interests at the beginning of his reign centred chiefly in the conflict with his suzerain which he had inherited from his father. For the Kings of France were now beginning to aim at breaking down the feudal independence of their tenants-in-chief, while Henry—by far the greatest of these tenants—was equally determined to make himself as far as possible a sovereign ruler over his fiefs. But in order to make his English resources of value to him in this struggle he had to restore order to the English government. As time went on he found this preliminary task both more difficult and more interesting than he had supposed; and by degrees it came to occupy quite as much of his thoughts as his designs on Toulouse, Brittany, and the Vexin. After the first years of his reign he could never find time for more than fleeting visits to his kingdom, but those visits were full of intense activity of mind and body, and they produced results of incalculable importance to our developing national character and constitution.

His first object was to put the clock back to 1135—to



obliterate the effect of the eighteen years since the death of Henry I. He cancelled all the grants of land and jurisdiction recently made, and had all the private castles pulled down. The barons were at first inclined to be defiant, but they soon realised that they had to do with a man who knew what he wanted and had the means to get it. One after another they made their peace with him. Order was restored everywhere, the Curia Regis re-established, strengthened, and re-modelled, and the royal authority carried into every part of the country.

The King's long absences on the Continent made it essential that a capable Chancellor should be appointed to carry this policy into effect; and Henry found an ideal man for the post in *Thomas Becket* (1118-1170). Becket was born in London of a middle-class Norman family. In age he was ten years the King's senior—old enough to command respect, but young enough to have a fellow-feeling for a high-spirited young king. He was as energetic of mind, body, and will as Henry himself, and had as great a talent for the business of government. Before long the two men were close friends, joining in hunting, jousting, and joking together in the intervals of reorganising the government of England. Becket had a taste for display which his master lacked, and for ten years he was the most splendid as well as the most powerful subject in the realm. Like most men of the professional classes in those days, he was in "minor orders"—that is to say, a churchman of lower rank than the priesthood; but there was nothing of the modest cleric in his demeanour, his way of life, or his high-handed insistence on the contributions of the Church to the cost of the King's foreign wars.

### 59. "*Benefit of Clergy*"

Thus passed six years of vigorous activity and comradeship between King and Chancellor; but then began a chain of events which led to an epoch-making catastrophe.

There was one great gap in the uniformity of law which Henry and Becket were engaged in establishing—the fact that men in Holy Orders claimed to be exempt from the ordinary law-courts. Since the days when William the Conqueror had

separated Church and Lay Courts (§ 49), great changes in the position had taken place. Firstly, Stephen had purchased clerical support in the Civil War by granting the Church independent jurisdiction over all cases in which clerics or Church property were concerned. Secondly, the Canon Law which was administered in these courts was fast growing by a succession of papal decrees into a complete system utterly at variance with the law of the land. Thirdly, the number of persons who could claim this "Benefit of Clergy" was growing rapidly year by year. Fully ordained priests were but a small proportion of them, for "Minor Orders" were granted to practically all men engaged in professions that involved reading and writing, as well as to the subordinate officials and servants of monasteries and cathedrals. To be able to mumble a few words of Latin was commonly taken as proof that an accused man—caught red-handed in murder, perhaps—was a cleric, and therefore amenable only to the "Courts Christian." Furthermore, these Courts Christian could inflict no penalty heavier than degradation or imprisonment—both of which they avoided as far as possible, since the Church was reluctant to admit that the sacred office could be forfeited when once it had been conferred; and she had no prisons. Consequently, the worst that the "criminous clerk" had usually to fear was suspension from the service of the Church, or a penance, or a fine.

Nor was even this the end of Henry's objections to the system. The Courts Christian were absorbing a great deal of business that had no connection whatever with the Church. Many laymen preferred to bring their private litigation—disputes about land, for instance—to be tried by Canon Law, on the pretext that a breach of contract involved perjury, which was a sin against God; and thus the King's courts were robbed of the fees and fines which made the holding of law-courts one of the most valuable privileges of government. And to make matters worse, any case before the Church courts could be called up by the Pope to be tried at Rome.

In its struggle to win supremacy over all human life, the Papacy was now straining every nerve to extend this jurisdiction, and Henry was equally determined to check its interference with his aims. As usual, he discussed the problem with Becket,

who carried through the preliminary stages of his policy by trying to induce the Church to give up the more extravagant of her claims. But it was obvious that a serious struggle lay ahead, and when the old Archbishop of Canterbury died in 1161 Henry determined to appoint the Chancellor himself to a post which would give him ample opportunity to carry through the plans they had formed. The bishops were (not unnaturally) alarmed at the prospect of having such a man as their Primate, and Becket himself was somewhat taken aback—he would have to be ordained priest to qualify for the highest priestly office in the land! But Henry brushed all these objections aside, and Becket was duly consecrated.

60. “ *The Holy Blissful Martyr* ”

From that moment an extraordinary change came over Becket's soul. Perhaps he was impressed by the consecration ceremony, perhaps his proud spirit could not brook interference with its own sphere of activity, whether that sphere was State or Church; probably a combination of both impulses was at work. Henceforth he stood by the interests of the ecclesiastical power just as vigorously as he had hitherto stood by those of the royal power. He sought by fasting and prayer to atone for the worldly pleasures of his past life, and determined to resist to the uttermost the least inroad on the privileges of his order.

At the beginning of 1164 the King summoned the bishops to his Court at Clarendon, and there laid before them the regulations by which he proposed in future to limit “Benefit of Clergy.” He claimed that these *Constitutions of Clarendon* merely restored the royal rights enjoyed by his predecessors. “Criminous clerks” were still to be tried by Church Courts. If the Church Court found them guilty it was to degrade them from their Holy Orders and hand them over to the King's officers, who would then punish them as ordinary laymen. Disputes about Church property were to be heard before the ordinary courts, and no appeals might be made to the Pope. At first Becket resisted these proposals, taking as his text the words, “Touch not mine anointed”; but after long and anxious consideration he changed his mind and decided

to accept them. "It is the King's will that I perjure myself," he said; "I will commit the crime that he desires, and do penance for it as I may." Yet after he had left Clarendon his conscience troubled him more and more until it became an agony; and at last he sent a message to the King withdrawing his acceptance. Henry was beside himself with rage, and by way of retaliation he suddenly called upon the Archbishop to account for an immense sum of money which had passed through his hands as Chancellor. Becket offered to compound for any claims with the sum of £2,000, but Henry would not hear of any excuse. Then the Archbishop appealed to the Pope, in defiance of the new Constitutions. For this offence he was condemned by the Curia Regis, but he proudly refused to listen to its judgment. As he swept from the hall some of the barons shouted, "Traitor!"; whereupon, with a flash of the old spirit, he turned furiously and exclaimed, "But that I am a priest I would have proved upon your bodies that you lie!" Fearing that some of the King's henchmen would seek to win their master's favour by murdering him, he fled abroad, took refuge in a monastery, and appealed to Rome once more.

Long negotiations followed between the Pope and the King. The Pope was in no position to offend Henry, for the quarrel between Papacy and Empire had just broken out afresh, and he wanted all the support he could get from other sovereigns. Meanwhile, Henry was faced with a new problem. He was particularly anxious to guard against a chance of a disputed succession after his death by having his eldest son crowned as co-king—a common practice at the time. It had always been considered the right of the Archbishop of Canterbury to perform the ceremony of coronation; but with Becket in exile and no prospect of an early settlement of the dispute, the King at last lost patience and had it performed by the Archbishop of York. Becket was indignant at the slight, and by this time the Pope felt bound to support him. He threatened to lay not only England but all the rest of the Angevin Empire under an "interdict" (§ 72). Even Henry was alarmed at this threat, especially as it would probably lead to the legality of his son's coronation being called in question. He therefore went to see Becket and patched up a sort of reconciliation with

him, though nothing was said at the interview about the real subject of the dispute. The King hoped that his old friend would now be magnanimous and let bygones be bygones; but the stern archbishop had no intention of giving way an inch. As soon as he landed in England he at once proceeded to excommunicate all the prelates who had taken part in the coronation ceremony. When the news was brought to Henry (who was keeping Christmas at Bayeux at the time) he fell into a tempestuous passion. "My subjects are sluggards, men of no spirit!" he exclaimed; "they allow me to be made the laughing-stock of a low-born clerk!"

Wild and whirling words, but only such as he had often uttered when provoked; yet now they were followed by results which were terrible for all concerned. Four knights who heard them, having grievances of their own against Becket, slipped away from the Court, took ship for England, galloped to Canterbury, and murdered the Archbishop in his cathedral (Dec. 1170).

Henry was appalled when he heard what had happened; and well he might be, for he soon found that Becket was an even more formidable enemy dead than alive. The shock to public opinion was so great that he was obliged to withdraw the Constitutions altogether, as we shall see in our next chapter. As for Becket, he was canonised two years later, and became the most venerated of English saints. For centuries to come thousands went on pilgrimage "the holy blissful martir for to seeke" along the Pilgrim's Way that leads to Canterbury.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *What went wrong during Stephen's reign, and how did Henry II put matters right?*

(2) *Write a short history of the Constitutions of Clarendon—their cause, their nature, and their result.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### Reforms and Rebellions

(1170-1189)

*The murder of Becket divided the reign of Henry II into two almost equal parts. The latter half of it was overshadowed by the consequences of the crime, and the King was constantly troubled by disaffection among the members of his own family. During these years his visits to England were few and short, yet he managed to carry through a remarkable series of reforms by which he laid the foundations upon which our judicial system rests to this day.*

#### 61. *The Conquest of Ireland*

The assassination of the Archbishop struck Europe dumb with horror. Murder was a less dreadful crime in the eyes of the twelfth century than sacrilege, and this was a combination of both. For weeks the King's courtiers watched him out of the corners of their eyes, half expecting him to be struck down by some terrible punishment from Heaven. He himself feared that he would be put under a ban of excommunication by the Pope. This would have been the end of everything for him. It would have released all his subjects and vassals from their allegiance and would have made rebellion against him a duty instead of a crime. And there were plenty of people eager for such an opportunity: the barons who chafed under his restraining hand; his suzerain, the King of France, who was jealous of his power; even (as we shall shortly see) the members of his own family.

Yet nothing happened. Spring and summer passed, and

with every day Henry's hope grew stronger that he was going to escape after all. It seemed that the Pope, being now involved in the renewed struggle with the Empire (§ 52), could not afford to make an enemy of him. He repeated his protestations of innocence and then turned, as a relief to the tension, to a distant scene of activity, namely, Ireland.

Irish civilisation had paid the price of maturing too quickly. The Irish Church and culture had flourished at a time when England, like the rest of Western Europe, was at the mercy of savage tribesmen (§ 13); but the remoteness which had then been an asset became later a disadvantage; for the Latin-Teutonic amalgam was now producing a great civilisation, whereas the Irish had drifted back into semi-barbarism. It would seem that there was something lacking in the Irish temperament—an impatience of discipline, perhaps. There had once been great kings in Ireland; but "The harp that once through Tara's halls the soul of music shed," had long been silent. There were now clans and septs innumerable, and the royal patrimony of Meath was divided among thirty quarrelsome kinglets. The Celtic Church had never gained firm hold over the common people—it consisted almost entirely of men who sought freedom from worldly responsibilities in monastic life. Nor had the Irish any taste for commerce or travel; connection with the outside world was maintained only by a few Danish settlements such as Dublin, Wexford, and Waterford.

One of their petty kings, Dermot of Leinster, had in 1166 sent for help in his local wars to Richard Clare, Earl of Pembroke, better known by his surname of Strongbow. Clare was an able soldier and statesman, but he had supported Stephen in the recent civil war, and had thereby lost most of his lands, as well as the favour of Henry II. This seemed an excellent opportunity for him to repair his fortunes. All Henry's attention was concentrated at the moment on the controversy with Becket, and he readily gave the Earl permission to conduct an independent enterprise in Ireland. Clare got together a considerable force in much the same way as William I had prepared for the conquest of England—by offering shares of the booty to volunteers. His expedition was completely successful, and by the end of 1170 he was master of something like a third of Ireland.

This was more than Henry had bargained for. He had not particularly wanted Ireland for himself, but he could not allow a vassal to make himself an independent prince. The Becket episode was by this time past its tragic climax, and he was now glad to divert attention from it (his own, perhaps, as well as other people's) by intervening in Ireland. He went thither in the autumn of 1171, and acted with characteristic energy. He fortified Dublin and Wexford, planting his own garrisons therein; he established a colony of English traders at Dublin; he planted Strongbow in a palatine earldom; and he summoned the Council of Cashel, whereat the Irish clergy introduced reforms which brought them into touch with the Roman Church. But then, before he had time to establish his authority over the whole island, he was recalled to France by urgent affairs, and this robbed the country of the permanent benefit it might have gained from his visit. The Anglo-Norman knights who had won lands there soon became "more Irish than the Irish themselves," and the country drifted once more outside the range of the great medieval civilisation which was now coming into full flower all over the rest of Western Europe.

### 62. *Family Quarrels*

What brought Henry back from Ireland with his work there only half finished was the news that the Pope had at last decided to accept his assurance that he had not intentionally instigated the murder of Becket. At Avranches (May, 1172) he met the papal legates and made his peace with the Church. As penance for his hasty words he undertook to support 200 knights in the Holy Land; and he promised to maintain no customs "hostile to the liberty of the Church." The vagueness of these words led to further disputes, but in the long run Henry had to concede almost all the Church's demands. All cases affecting wills and marriages were reserved for the Courts Christian, appeals might be made from them to Rome, and for centuries to come a clerk in the humblest of Holy Orders might rob or murder without incurring (for the first offence, at any rate) the penalties of the secular law.

Another symptom of Henry's loss of caste in the eyes of his



contemporaries was rebellion of his sons and barons which now broke out. These troubles were fomented by his elderly Queen, Eleanor, who had reason to be jealous of his relations with other women. They were also encouraged by the King of France, whose aims, as we have seen, were necessarily antagonistic to those of his greatest vassal. Any enemy of Henry would always be sure of a sympathetic reception at Paris, especially if it were one of his own children.

It must be admitted that Henry was not very wise in his treatment of his four sons, Henry, Richard, Geoffrey, and John. His fatherly affection made him anxious to see them suitably provided for, but he could not bring himself to entrust them with governmental powers in the provinces he assigned to them, nor would he allow them to handle the revenues. They none of them lacked courage or ability, but they were a particularly selfish and undutiful set of young men, and they chafed at this lack both of power and of pocket-money. The eldest had already been crowned co-King of England and Duke of Normandy; Richard became Count of Aquitaine, and Geoffrey married the heiress of the Count of Brittany. The youngest, John, was still a "lackland," but Henry arranged an advantageous match for him with a princess of Savoy. The prince's prospective father-in-law demanded that an appanage should be formed for the young couple in France, and the King proposed to carve this out of Anjou. This made the younger Henry very angry, for Anjou had been assigned to him. He rushed off to the Court of Louis VII, where Richard and Geoffrey joined him at the instigation of their mother. A great coalition was formed, including, besides the brothers, the Kings of France and Scotland and a number of the chief nobles of Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine.

But the allies did not trust each other, they were unable to agree upon a united plan of campaign, and their coalition very quickly broke up. The King could always rely on the loyalty of the lesser nobility—the one-manor-men—and the freeholders, who dreaded the prospect of a return to "Stephenism." He was therefore able to raise an army which awed the malcontent barons into making their submission, one by one. While this process was going on, Henry paid a pilgrimage to Becket's

shrine at Canterbury, where he allowed himself to be scourged by the eighty clergy present. The very next night news reached him which seemed like a sign that Heaven's favour had been restored to him. William the Lion, King of Scotland, raiding in Northumberland, had been captured while lost in a fog. The distinguished prisoner was carried to Normandy, and there he agreed to the *Treaty of Falaise*, by which he did homage to Henry for the kingdom of Scotland. He afterwards attended Henry's court along with the other principal tenants-in-chief, and married an English heiress.

After that, the rebellion of 1173-1174 died down altogether. Henry forgave his sons, but banished Eleanor permanently from his court. For the time being, at any rate, he had won a complete triumph, since the movement had gained for him the suzerainty of Scotland and an excuse to confiscate the estates of hostile barons.

### 63. *The Common Law*

More trouble was in store for him in his Continental dominions, but in England the rest of his reign was fifteen years of peaceful development such as was rarely enjoyed in any country during the Middle Ages. The King carried through a remarkable series of reforms in the legal system. If we were asked to express in a single sentence what Henry II did for England, we should say: He established the idea of the Law—one law for the whole land. It was only recently that on the Continent men had begun to grasp the idea that Law is something more than a local code of regulations issued by a particular ruler, that it is a *science* developing out of general principles which can be studied. This conception had arisen from the revived study of Roman law in Italy and France, and Henry had the advantage of taking up the problems of English government after an education in this new knowledge. But he was no rash innovator, recklessly replacing ancient local customs by cut-and-dried schemes imported from abroad. He was a practical ruler who could make use of theoretical training without letting it run away with him. His attention had first been drawn to the matter by the necessity for settling the country after the disorders

of the last reign ; but one change led to another, and before his death he had altered the whole complexion of the English judicial system.

He had already made one important change in the first half of his reign ; the separation of the legal from the governmental business of the Curia Regis. Henceforth, a staff of judges became specialists in dealing with law cases. But the King was constantly moving from place to place, with the Curia in attendance, which was extremely inconvenient for litigants. Henry I had done something to remedy this by sending members of the Curia to sit in shire-courts from time to time ; but these visits were irregular and the powers of the judges doubtful. Henry II now put the system on a definite footing. By the *Assize of Clarendon* (1164) it was laid down that "Justices in Eyre" (*i.e.* judges on tour) could sit in any court—even those carried on by the great tenants-in-chief, and that they had the sole right of dealing with serious crimes such as robbery or murder. This practice led to one unforeseen consequence of the greatest importance. These judges formed a permanent link between the local courts and the Curia Regis. They were constantly meeting and discussing cases, and from these discussions they began to formulate regular principles which they applied to new cases which came before them on circuit. From these beginnings grew up in the course of centuries that most remarkable of our national institutions, the English *Common Law*, which is not created by Act of Parliament, or deduced from Roman Law, but is based on judgments given by earlier judges in parallel circumstances.

Then came a change in the position of the sheriffs. There had been many complaints that these baronial officers abused their powers during the King's absence, so in 1170 by the *Inquest of Sheriffs* he inquired into these charges, dismissed nearly all the existing sheriffs, and appointed in their place officials of the Exchequer—trained administrators over whom he could exercise direct control.

The practice of sending out itinerant justices and the reform in the position of the sheriffs were both direct blows at the local independence of the barons ; another such blow, but more subtle and indirect, was the institution of *Scutage* or shield-

money. It had long been the custom to allow bishops and abbots to pay money instead of sending knights to do military service for their lands, and Henry, from the very beginning of his reign, began to extend this privilege to the lay tenants-in-chief. It suited him very well, for it enabled him to hire mercenary troops who were not restricted to the feudal forty days' service, and it tended to deprive the barons of the forces which they might otherwise have used to make war on himself.

#### 64. *Trial by Jury*

Henry's other great contribution to our legal system was trial by jury.

Let us picture the proceedings in a shire-court before his time. The court is held in the open air, possibly on a "moot-mound" where justice has been done since the days of the Druids. The sheriff presides, representing the King. All the tenants-in-chief, great and small, of the county are expected to attend and take part in the administration of justice. The custom of "compurgation" (§ 16) has died out by this time, but there is still no notion of hearing witnesses and sifting evidence. If one man says, "You did it!" and another says, "I didn't," it is beyond the wit of man to decide which of them is telling the truth—that must be left to God to declare. The priest performs a ritual by which the instruments of *The Ordeal* are consecrated. Then the accused man walks three paces with a red-hot iron in his hand, and if his hand heals in three days it is a sign in his favour; or if the local custom favours the "Ordeal by Water," he is thrown bound into a pool, and if guilty he will float on the surface. The Ordeal was used for criminal cases only. Disputes about land were mostly between persons of Norman blood, and it was the Norman custom of *Trial by Combat* that was used. In this, the disputants hacked each other about with ancient traditional weapons (specially sanctified for the purpose, like the instruments of the Ordeal) made of horn and wood, until one of them cried, "craven!" Some men made quite a good living as professional champions for litigants who could not fight themselves—women, or minors, or corporations such as monasteries.

This appeal to Heaven to show on which side justice lay betokens a simple faith which we seem to have lost nowadays; and, indeed, even by the middle of the twelfth century a feeling had already arisen that some more rational method ought to be found for discovering the truth. Henry's solution was an extension of the "Jury." The word comes from the French *jurés*, and means a group of persons who have undertaken to tell the truth about something. It was a process of bringing local knowledge to bear on a question of general interest. Kings had long since used it for matters that concerned themselves—we have seen an example in the Domesday Survey (§ 50); and it had sometimes been applied, as a special privilege, to disputes between tenants-in-chief who wanted to avoid the hazards of the Combat. At the Assize of Clarendon (the same which authorised the sending out of Justices in Eyre) Henry II sanctioned its use in all cases, both civil and criminal. In civil cases either of the parties could decline a challenge to Trial by Combat and "put himself upon the King's Grand Assize," when the sheriff was to summon twelve knights, chosen from the district where the disputed property lay, to state before the king's judge which of the claimants, according to local memory and opinion, had the better right to it. The sheriff was also to collect a jury in each hundred to "present" criminals to the king's judge; and all persons so presented were to be presumed guilty unless they could clear themselves by the Ordeal.\* Even if they did so they were not to be discharged "without a stain on their character," if they were men of bad reputation; they were then banished instead of being hanged.

All this seems to our notions a crude method of doing justice, but it was an immense improvement on anything that had gone before. Early in the following century the Church forbade priests to take part in the superstitious rites of Ordeal and Combat, and these customs gradually died out; while the jury system developed into one of the most characteristic of our English institutions—the entrusting of questions of guilt or

\* This was the origin of the modern "Grand Jury." In the course of the next 250 years another type of jury developed out of it—what we to-day call the "Petty Jury," which hears evidence and gives a verdict based thereon, in the presence of a judge.

innocence to members of the ordinary public instead of to professional experts.

### 65. *The Last Decade*

While these peaceful developments were going on in England, disaffection against the King, both in his family and among his feudal vassals, was still smouldering in his Continental dominions, and during the last years of his life these broke once more into flame. The younger Henry was very jealous because Richard had now been entrusted with more power in Aquitaine than he himself had in Normandy, and he fled for a second time to the French Court, where the young king, Philip Augustus, encouraged him to make an attack on his brother.

Henry II was grieved to see his sons at loggerheads, but at first he thought it best to let them fight their quarrel out. He busied himself with an *Assize of Arms* (1181) which brought the old Saxon fyrd (§ 39) up-to-date by ordaining that all English freemen were to provide themselves with arms and armour according to their station in life, to enable them to take due part in the national defence. Then, in 1183 he intervened in Aquitaine, only to find that his sons refused his mediation, and actually made war on him. This painful situation was soon brought to an end by the death of the young Henry through a fever; but it only gave place to another, equally distressing. Richard being now heir-apparent to England and Normandy, the King suggested that he should give up Aquitaine to John, who was still unprovided for. But Richard declined to fall in with this proposal, and rather than make war on his own son, Henry gave way. John was now sent to Ireland as Viceroy; but the experiment was not a success, for he squandered the revenues in riotous living and insulted the Irish chieftains who came to do him homage by ridiculing their unkempt appearance and uncouth manners.

Then fresh trouble broke out for the old King. His third son, Geoffrey, Count of Brittany, died, leaving as heir a newly-born infant, Prince Arthur. The King of France claimed that as suzerain of Brittany he had the right to be the orphan's guardian; but Henry refused to place a grandson who might one day be King of England in the hands of his greatest enemy.

The two kings were on the brink of war, when tremendous news came from the East : the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem (§ 53) had been conquered by the Saracens, and the Holy City was once more in the hands of Moslem unbelievers. The cry went up that all Christendom must unite to win it back. Richard "took the cross" at once, and Philip and Henry soon came to an agreement to lay aside their private quarrel for the same purpose. Henry raised a great sum for his proposed expedition by means of the *Saladin Tithe* (1188). This levy was remarkable in two ways : it was the first tax to be levied on goods as well as on land ; and it was assessed by juries who gave evidence as to the value of the property in their neighbourhood.

Just as the preparations were at their height yet another quarrel broke out between the King and his eldest surviving son—this time about a marriage settlement. Richard now cut himself off from his father altogether by doing homage to the King of France for all the Angevin dominions south of the Channel. Henry was beside himself with grief, rage, and shame. He collected an army, but he could not bring himself to fight his son with any vigour, his health and spirits were fast failing, and he had all the worst of the campaign. The final blow came when he found that Prince John, his favourite son, his Benjamin, had joined the coalition against him. If ever a man died of a broken heart, Henry of Anjou did.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *How far would it be true to say that the murder of Becket was the turning point of the reign of Henry II ?*

(2) *Estimate the policy and ability of Henry II as a law-giver.*

## CHAPTER XIV

### The End of the Angevin Empire

(1189-1204)

*For a hundred and forty years England had been part of an empire ruled by princes with divided interests. This connection with the Continent came to an end under the sons of Henry II, because one of them was a knightly warrior rather than a statesmanlike king, while the other was the slave of his own base passions. Thus the country began to have a separate existence again.*

#### 66 *Cœur de Lion*

At the moment of his father's death, *Richard I* was preparing to go on crusade, and he hardly thought of his inheritance save as a means of enabling him to do so more effectively. During his reign of ten years he was in England barely six months, and his object during each of his two short visits was mainly to raise money to spend elsewhere. Yet his English subjects were always proud of him, and something of that feeling still lingers in our minds to-day. For he was a fine type of the fighting-man. His reckless courage in the field, his indomitable determination to overcome the handicap of chronic ill-health, his chivalrous generosity to friend and foe, his love of poetry and music, the adventurous spirit with which he refused to listen to the counsels of prudence: these are qualities which it is easy to admire. But they do not make a good king, and Richard was a very bad one. In his impatience to gather funds for his Crusade he sacrificed some of the permanent resources of the Crown, and so weakened the position of the monarchy—and we must never forget that in feudal times the stronger the king the



better for the country. He sold titles, claims to jurisdiction, important offices of state, bishoprics, Crown lands, with careless haste. He cancelled the *Treaty of Falaise* (§ 62) in return for a handsome subscription to his fund from the King of Scotland ; he made his cousin, the Bishop of Durham, almost an independent ruler north of the Tees by selling him the earldom and sheriffdom of Northumberland ; he regarded it as a remarkable piece of self-sacrifice that he hired out the chief position in the government during his absence not to the highest bidder, but to a cleric who really had some qualifications for the post.

### 67. *The Third Crusade*

Richard had entered into a sort of crusading partnership with Philip Augustus of France ; and as soon as he had wrung all the available money out of England, he crossed over to the Continent to make the final arrangements for the expedition. The two men were an ill-matched pair of allies, for Philip was more of a politician than a soldier, and was always working towards a great united French monarchy that could only be brought into existence at the expense of Richard's Angevin Empire. They took their time about the journey, and spent the winter of 1190-1191 in Sicily, quarrelling with each other and with the ruler of the island. After that, Richard turned aside to conquer Cyprus. It was not until the summer of 1191 that he arrived in Palestine.

The situation he found there was deplorable. The kingdom of Jerusalem (§ 53) had collapsed largely through its own internal weakness. Even the Orders of Knights Templar and Knights of St. John, which had been formed to protect pilgrims, had shared in the general decay. The famous Sultan Saladin, whose courage and chivalry gained him as much respect among the "Franks" as Richard soon won among the Saracens, was now master of the whole country between the Nile and the Euphrates, and the only spot left in Christian hands was Tyre. The first object of the crusaders was to capture Acre, as a sea-base from which to attack Jerusalem. But their camp around it soon became a welter of folly, vice, and misery. Disputes broke out as to who was to be the future King of Jerusalem ; storms

prevented the landing of supplies ; thousands were carried off by pestilence. Richard himself was so weakened by disease that he had to be carried about in a litter ; but nothing could check the energy with which he directed the siege. Before long he gained the reputation of being the most enterprising of commanders and the most generous of paymasters, and knights began to desert the other leaders to take service under him. Naturally, this ascendancy aroused a good deal of jealousy. When Acre was at last captured he quarrelled violently with Duke Leopold of Austria, who had taken possession of a house in the city which was claimed by an English knight. Richard had the Austrian flag taken down and thrown into a sewer, whereupon the Duke went off home in high dudgeon. Soon afterwards King Philip also abandoned the crusade. He had been very ill—so ill that he had lost his hair and finger-nails, we are told ; but his real motive for returning to France was his desire to take advantage of his rival's preoccupation in Palestine.

Richard's position as commander-in-chief was now unchallenged, and in August he set out on the march to Jerusalem that was to end in the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre. But it was not to be. The crusaders suffered terribly from heat, sand, flies, and thirst ; while their cumbrous arms and armour placed them at a hopeless disadvantage against Saladin's light-armed horsemen and archers. By the time they had got within sight of Jerusalem it had become obvious that even if they took the city by storm they would be unable to keep it without reinforcements, of which there was no prospect. Bitterly disappointed, Richard withdrew to the coast. His health had broken down again, and he learnt that Philip was conspiring with his brother to rob him of his heritage. He therefore made a three years' truce with Saladin which left the coast towns in the crusaders' possession. He honestly intended to return and complete the sacred task he had undertaken, but he was never able to do so, and the Holy City remained in Moslem hands until the World War.

### 68. *England in the Reign of Richard*

Meanwhile, a minor revolution had taken place in the government of England. Richard had left the supreme control

in the hands of his Justiciar, one *William Longchamp*. The son of a Poitevin serf, Longchamp had entered the Church as the one career open to a talented man of low birth, and had already shown ability as an administrator in Aquitaine. But in England he soon made himself very unpopular among the nobles of the Great Council by his arrogance and greed; and Prince John made common cause with the malcontents in the hope of being able to fish in troubled waters. The opposition gained the support of London by promising the city the position which so many Continental cities were gaining at this time—that of an independent “commune,” with an elected mayor. Longchamps was unable to resist this combination; he resigned and returned to Normandy. But Prince John was disappointed in his expectation that the nobles would now accept him as regent. They had already learnt to know him and distrust him, and they felt quite able to carry on the government themselves on behalf of the absent King, to whom they were entirely loyal. Thereupon, John went over to Paris and made an alliance with Philip Augustus, who had just returned from the Crusade. But for the time being their designs on the Angevin Empire came to nothing, as the French barons refused to take part in an attack on the lands of an absent crusader.

Then, early in 1193, came the startling news that King Richard, while trying to make his way home overland, had been captured by his enemy, the Duke of Austria. Philip and John made the most of the situation by bringing against him a charge of complicity in the murder of one of the crusading princes in Palestine; but the Great Council of England sent at once to Austria to inquire what the amount of the ransom would be. The holding of distinguished prisoners of war to ransom was a regular source of income to a successful warrior in those days, and a king was a rare and precious prize. The gigantic sum of £100,000 was named, and special taxes were imposed on Richard's dominions to raise it. In England a quarter of all land revenues and of all movable property was demanded. Even so, it was impossible to collect such a sum in one year; but Richard (who had meanwhile cleared himself of the murder charge) was released after a part had been paid and hostages given as security for the remainder.

He was received in England with great enthusiasm, for his crusading renown compensated in the hearts of his subjects for all his shortcomings as a ruler. He generously forgave his brother for his plots; but even now, when England had bled herself white for his sake, he had little thought for her welfare. Perhaps his neglect was a testimony to the efficiency of the governmental machinery set going by his father, which ran smoothly even without a king to control it. At all events, as soon as he had seized all the money he could lay his hands on, he departed to combat the designs of Philip Augustus on his Continental lands. He never returned. The last five years of his life were spent in confused and fluctuating warfare in Normandy and Aquitaine; and he was eventually killed in an obscure skirmish with a rebellious Norman vassal.

During most of this latter half of his reign England was ruled on his behalf by *Hubert Walter*, who combined the offices of Justiciar and Archbishop of Canterbury. Walter's main concern was to satisfy his master's incessant demands for money; but in the process of doing this he made several fruitful developments in Henry II's system of government. For instance, Henry had diminished the functions of the sheriffs, and Walter carried the process a stage further. It had hitherto been left to the sheriffs to decide what judicial cases and administrative matters should be brought before the King's justices when they came round; but Walter caused each shire-court to elect four knights called "coroners" to settle such points; and similar committees of "knights of the shire" were elected to choose juries and to assess the proportion of the taxes to be paid by each hundred. These regulations were the foundation of a rural gentry accustomed to carrying on the business of local government—the "justices of the peace" as they were afterwards called. They became a unique and vital feature of our English social life in the centuries to come.

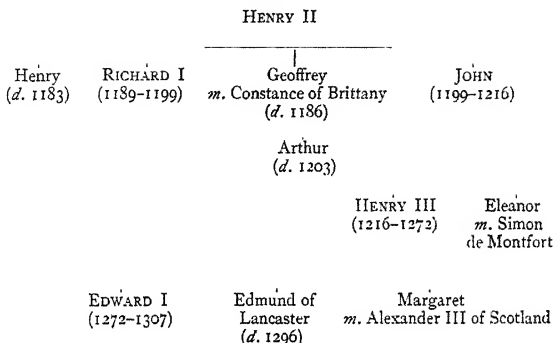
### 69. *The Loss of Normandy and Anjou*

Richard on his deathbed had recognised his brother *John* as his successor. By the modern law of heredity, which was just then coming into force, the true heir was the twelve-year-old

Arthur, Count of Brittany, who was the son of an older brother ; but a tradition still lingered that a grown man had a better claim than a child who could not rule in person. And certainly, if ever a heritage required a capable ruler, it was the scattered Angevin Empire, which was threatened by a supremely able and altogether unscrupulous enemy. To build up the French monarchy at the expense of the Plantagenet dominions was the great object of King Philip's life. In the early years of his reign he had been pitted against a great statesman in Henry II ; then for some years against a world-famous warrior in Richard Cœur de Lion ; but now his great chance had come, for there were rival claimants to the Angevin heritage, of whom one was a child and the other a fool. For, although John was a capable soldier who could on occasion show both ingenuity in planning a campaign and energy in carrying it out, these capacities were nullified by defects in character which brought his whole career to ruin. He was utterly self-centred, and utterly unable to control his passions ; above all, he was so completely unaware of any difference between right and wrong that he could never foresee the effects of his wickedness on the minds of other people.

John got himself crowned both in London and Rouen, but with Richard's crown he had inherited the hostility of Philip Augustus, who naturally declared in favour of Arthur. The decisive factor in the struggle that followed was the baronage of the Angevin provinces, amongst whom the leading figure was one William des Roches. This party tried to take advantage of the situation by supporting whichever side seemed to offer the greatest measure of feudal independence. It began by getting hold of Arthur, and henceforth that unfortunate lad became a mere pawn in the game that was being played by self-seeking kings and nobles. Of course, des Roches and his friends liked the idea of having a child as their immediate overlord ; so they bought the support of Philip against John by inducing Arthur to do homage to the French King for Anjou, Maine, and Brittany. But they soon had reason to suspect that Philip intended to exploit his guardianship to annex these provinces outright. They therefore changed sides and carried the boy off to John.

THE EARLY PLANTAGENETS



John had thus won the first round of the contest ; but he immediately threw away his advantage by a crude act of self-will. He divorced his wife and married a lady who was betrothed to one of his own vassals, a very influential noble of Poitou. All the other French barons, including des Roches and his friends, were aflame with indignation at this insult to their Order. They once more gained possession of Arthur, and appealed to Philip, who summoned John, as his feudal vassal, to appear before him to answer for the offence. John refused to do so, and was declared to have forfeited his fiefs. War broke out again, in the course of which Arthur fell into the hands of John, who lodged him in a castle on the Seine. The boy was never seen again, and there is not the least doubt that he was murdered by his uncle's orders—indeed, it was rumoured that the deed was done by his uncle's own hands. John's object in committing this atrocious crime was to deprive his enemies of their figure-head ; but its only result was to confirm them in their determination not to have such a miscreant as their ruler.

The Normans (who were sick of the depredations of his mercenaries), the Bretons (who had been devoted to their young Count), the Angevins (who were under the immediate influence of des Roches)—all rallied round Philip. Against such a combination John could make no headway; and he gave way to one of those fits of paralysed lassitude to which he was subject. "Let be, let be!" he would say, "I shall win it all back again." By the end of 1204 he was driven out altogether, and left his handful of supporters to make what terms they could with the King of France. Within a year nothing was left of the Angevin heritage save Gascony and part of Guienne, which remained loyal because of their valuable wine trade with England.

### 70. *The Results of the Separation*

The break-up of the Plantagenet Empire was a great step towards the formation of two nations. The dominions ruled by Philip Augustus were more than doubled in extent, while England had become an independent unit again, after being for 140 years attached to the Continental dominions of her kings. The connection having come to an end, it will be of interest to sum up its permanent results.

To nine-tenths of the population—the villeins—the change of masters after the Conquest was a change for the worse, in one respect at any rate. There had always been a distinction between land-worker and fighting-man, but a barrier of language now made it completer than ever and placed the one in a position of definite inferiority to the other. For the serf who supported the whole community by his labour became closely connected with the land he tilled. He could not be allowed to move from it without his lord's consent. He was "attached to the soil," which would have been useless without him. It must not be supposed that this led to very serious oppression as a rule, for the serf was protected by a power more effective than the law—namely, by the fact that the lord was dependent on his labour. Local "customs" grew up which laid down exactly how much service was due from the villein for his holding in the manor-fields; and for the most part the lord did not try to overstep

this limit. It paid him to have contented villeins, for even the most active of bailiffs could not make them work hard if they were sulky, or prevent them from running away if they were driven desperate by ill-usage.

Another result of the connection was a constant coming and going of knights and clerics, who brought the country into touch with a much wider range of ideas than could ever have evolved out of Anglo-Saxondom. England was for the time a part of one great community between Pyrenees and Cheviots, wherein the ruling classes all spoke the same language and were pervaded by the same ideas—those of the most advanced civilisation in Europe, the French. There are still many Norman buildings to remind us of the connection; and it was a Continental movement—the Crusades—which brought to this country the architectural ideas which gradually developed into what we call Gothic. Much of the finest work in this new style was put into the Cistercian abbeys, such as Fountains and Tintern, which were built in the reigns of Henry I and Stephen; and the Cistercian monastic order was a direct outcome of the Anglo-French connection, inasmuch as it was founded in France but had an Englishman (Stephen Harding) for its first abbot.

In "Ivanhoe" Scott depicts the Saxons and Normans as distinct and antagonistic races as late as the reign of Richard I; but this is not a true picture of the times so far as the classes above the lowest are concerned. By the middle of the twelfth century the two races had become fused, largely through the intermarriage of Franco-Norman knights and men-at-arms with Anglo-Saxon women. The battle of Tinchebrai (§ 55), won by Englishmen over Normans, had wiped out the humiliating memories of Senlac. A difference of language still separated the classes—and, indeed, for centuries to come no Englishman with any pretensions to high social position spoke anything but French; but no national feeling was offended by this distinction.

One notable result of the break-up of the Plantagenet dominions was the splitting of the great baronial families which had possessions on both sides of the Channel. The English estates usually went to one brother and the French to another. The English nobles, thus shut in together by the sea, began to



feel a distinction between themselves and their French relatives and to develop different traditions. Before long all sense of blood-relationship was lost and the separation became complete.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *How far are we justified in looking on Richard I as an English national hero?*

(2) *What were the effects upon England of King John's losses in France?*

## CHAPTER XV

### The Great Charter

(1204-1216)

*King John spent his reign in three great quarrels. Each of them was provoked by his lack of self-control and of moral feeling; in each of them he was worsted after a prolonged struggle; and each of them produced consequences important in English history. The first—the war with Philip II of France for the Angevin dominions—we have already discussed. The others—the quarrels with Pope Innocent III and with the English barons—form the subject of this chapter.*

#### 71. *The Quarrel with the Barons*

So long as the King had been occupied abroad, the government of England had been carried on smoothly by his Justiciar, Geoffrey FitzPeter; but as soon as his expulsion from Normandy compelled him to give this country the doubtful benefit of his presence, trouble began. This was not altogether his fault, for he found himself in a very difficult position. His revenue was halved by the loss of his Continental dominions, and his expenses doubled by his spasmodic and futile attempts to recover them. By feudal law the barons could not be required to perform military service abroad, and they flatly declined to volunteer for hopeless enterprises under a king whom they disliked and despised. John was, therefore, compelled to engage mercenaries and subsidise foreign allies; and in order to find the money to pay them he was driven to desperate expedients, such as demanding aids and reliefs on an excessive scale,

abusing the right of wardship, keeping bishoprics vacant, inflicting enormous fines in the royal law-courts. These practices aroused bitter opposition. The whole fabric of feudalism rested on *custom*. The barons felt that if they allowed the King to overstep the limits imposed on him by tradition, there was no reason why he should not in time bring them all to ruin. Of course, expostulation was useless with a man like John; the only remedy was armed rebellion. Yet it was very difficult to organise united action among a lot of jealous barons against a vigorous king with a hired army at his back. John had to be very adroit in running round the circle in which he found himself—compelled to employ mercenaries to keep down angry barons, and to pay the mercenaries with revenues extorted by methods that made the barons angry; but for years he managed to keep at bay the forces which were always threatening to overwhelm him.

### 72. *The Quarrel with the Pope*

As if this quarrel with the nobles were not enough, he soon got into an even more serious conflict with the Church. In 1205 the archbishopric of Canterbury fell vacant. Strictly speaking, the right of electing the Primate lay with the monks of Canterbury, but as a matter of practice the cleric nominated by the King had always been chosen by them. Some of the younger generation among them thought that this would be a good opportunity to assert their independence. They met secretly by night, elected their sub-prior, and sent him off to Rome at once to be consecrated, enjoining him to keep his appointment secret until it had been confirmed by the Pope. But the head of the sub-prior had been somewhat turned by his sudden elevation, and he had hardly landed in Flanders before he began boasting of it. The story soon reached the King's ears. He was furiously angry, declared the election null and void, and ordered the monks to elect a supporter of his own, a "political" bishop named de Gray. The monks, disgusted at the folly of their own candidate, complied; and thus a second "archbishop" appeared at Rome a week or two after the arrival of the first.

The Pope before whom the matter came was *Innocent III*,

the greatest man that ever sat on the throne of St. Peter. Only thirty-seven years of age when elected in 1198, he was still in the prime of life, a man of noble appearance, of lofty character, of profound scholarship, of inexhaustible energy and indomitable will. He carried to the utmost limits the Hildebrandine insistence on the papal supremacy over every aspect of human life. "The Lord Jesus Christ," he wrote, "has set up one ruler over all things as His universal vicar; and as all things in heaven, earth, and hell bow the knee to Christ, so should all obey Christ's vicar, that there be one flock and one shepherd." In grappling with the tremendous task which this view of his powers imposed upon him, he displayed almost superhuman activity. He sent out five thousand letters in the first year of his pontificate alone. Nothing was too great or too small for him to interfere with. He regulated the private lives of kings, he made and unmade emperors, he tried to promote another crusade, he fostered religious orders.

His method of dealing with the problem of the English primacy was characteristic. Summoning a deputation of the Canterbury monks to Rome, he informed them that neither of the candidates was acceptable; they must elect a nominee of his own, one *Stephen de Langton*. Langton was undoubtedly the best man for the position. He was an Englishman born, though long resident in Rome; a cardinal, a famous theologian, a man of unblemished character and of statesmanlike outlook. But John was up in arms at this denial of the traditional rights of a King of England, and he refused to allow Langton even to land. By way of putting pressure on him, Innocent laid England under an "interdict." This meant that all public worship ceased. No masses were said, there were no burial services for the dead; marriages could only take place in church porches; baptisms had to be performed in private. We can hardly conceive what this meant in those days, when religious ceremonial and sacrament played such an essential part in everyday life. Yet John hardened his heart and persisted in his defiance; nor was he perturbed when, a year later, he was placed under a ban of excommunication, which absolved all his subjects and vassals from obedience to him. We might expect that the barons would take this opportunity of rising against

him ; but as a matter of fact, the immediate effect of the papal attack was to strengthen his position, inasmuch as it gave him an excuse to forfeit ecclesiastical revenues wholesale. For the time being he no longer needed to extort subsidies from his tenants ; and when in Ireland and Wales attempts were made to throw off allegiance to him, he was able to crush these movements by vigorous and successful campaigns.

For five years this state of things continued. King and Pope were equally determined not to give way. Then Innocent authorised Philip of France to undertake a special " crusade " against this enemy to Mother Church. Philip Augustus was delighted at a commission to win another kingdom for himself, and made active preparations to carry it out. John tried to mobilise a defence force in Kent, but he now found that he had almost reached the end of his tether. Everybody was yearning to see the church doors open and to hear the church bells ring out again ; and everybody longed to be free from the danger of hell-fire through lack of the sacraments. John had spent all the confiscated Church revenues, and his mercenaries were getting mutinous. Even those barons who came at his summons put pressure on him to make his peace with the Pope. Thereupon John suddenly decided on a complete reversal of his whole policy. He not merely undertook to accept Langton as Archbishop and to restore the Church property—he asked the Pope to accept the overlordship of England. This was a very astute move. At one stroke he had gained the support of the tremendous power which had hitherto been exerted against him—the moral force of the Catholic Church—and he had cut the ground from beneath the feet of all his enemies, domestic and foreign.

### 73. *Bouvines*

When the Pope countermanded the " crusade " against John, who had now become his obedient vassal, King Philip refused to abandon the costly enterprise which he had undertaken at Innocent's own request, and went on with his preparations for an invasion of England. Meanwhile, John had planned a counter-attack on France, in alliance with some of Philip's discontented vassals and with the ex-Emperor Otto IV. The

general idea of the proposed campaign was for Otto and the Count of Flanders to advance on Paris from the north-east, while John and the Count of Toulouse advanced from the south-west. But when John tried to raise an army for the purpose he found his English barons just as unwilling either to fight or to pay as they had been before he had made his peace with the Pope. They were determined not to give him the means of crushing them with a hired army, and they now began, under the leadership of Langton, to devise a plan to compel him to reform his whole method of government.

The Archbishop was a far-sighted statesman. He knew the unwisdom of asking too much, and induced the barons to base their demands on the Charter granted by Henry I at his accession, which had for a century been taken as laying down a moderate and fair standard of feudal custom. The Pope rebuked Langton for continuing to direct the opposition to John now that lost lamb had returned to the fold of Mother Church; but Langton felt that he understood English conditions better than Innocent possibly could, and he braved the papal wrath in the interests of the other English magnates.

John, blinded by his own insolent carelessness of other people's feelings, ignored the dangers which threatened him at home and sailed off to Bordeaux to organise the attack on the King of France. He had to leave his barons behind in England, plotting against him, and to rely for his campaign on paid soldiers; but he hoped to win a resounding success that would enable him to recover his lost provinces and thus give him the means of crushing domestic opposition. He won some minor successes in Toulouse, but defective communications ruined the campaign as a whole. Each of the allies waited for the other to begin the march on Paris; and on July 27, 1214, the Emperor's forces were utterly defeated by Philip at the *Battle of Bouvines*. This may be looked upon as one of the decisive battles of the world. It led to the consolidation of the French monarchy, and it paved the way for the first great constitutional check upon the royal power in England.

74. "*The Great Charter of English Liberties*"

King John come back to England a disappointed, angry, and humiliated man. He was in no mood for concessions, and he at once demanded a punitive scutage from all his tenants-in-chief who had disobeyed the summons to the French campaign. They refused to pay, and the leading spirits among them met at Bury St. Edmunds, where they took an oath to stand together until the King had satisfied their demands. Soon some 2,000 knights with their attendant men-at-arms had foregathered, and the "Host of the Lord and of Holy Church," as it called itself, advanced southwards to bring the King to terms.

Henry II had reorganised the fyrd by his *Assize of Arms* (§ 65) to meet just such an emergency as this; but the freeholders who formed the backbone of that institution were almost as angry with John as the barons. And the culminating blow to John's chance of successful resistance came when the City of London, equally offended by his arbitrary taxation, opened its gates to the "Host" and threw in its lot with their cause. All government was paralysed, the Curia Regis ceased to function, no revenues could be collected.

Then the King surrendered as suddenly and completely as he had done to the Pope two years before. Archbishop Langton acted as mediator, and on June 15, 1215, John set his seal in the famous meadow of Runnymede to the document known to later ages as "The Great Charter." Hardly any of its sixty clauses could be considered innovations. Most of them are concerned with purely feudal matters, promising tenants-in-chief the rights and privileges which they had enjoyed in the time of Henry I. For instance, Clause XII says that "No scutage or special aid shall be levied except with the consent of the Common Council"; while Clause XIV lays it down that to the meetings of this Council all the greater tenants shall be summoned individually, and the lesser tenants through the sheriffs. This is merely expressing what had long been the custom in theory, if not always in practice. Similarly with the clauses which provide for the administration of justice. Clause XXXIX says that "No freeman shall be imprisoned, or dispossessed, or outlawed . . . save by the lawful judgment of his peers" (*i.e.* by his equals

in rank) "or by the law of the land" (*i.e.* the local custom as to Ordeals); while Clause XL promises that "To none will we sell, to none will we delay or deny right and justice." Nothing could seem more obvious and commonplace. No new principles are enunciated; all that is done is to promise redress for specific breaches of custom.

What, then, are the claims of *Magna Carta* to be regarded as a sacred palladium of our national liberties? Mainly for two indirect consequences, neither of which was foreseen or intended by the men who framed it.

Firstly, it implied that the law was above the king. It took for granted that laws are not merely the will of the sovereign, to be obeyed only if he can enforce them, but the guarantee of common rights, which must be supported by all men of good will towards the community.

Secondly, later generations misunderstood it. For instance, the word *libertas* was not used in the modern sense of "liberty"; it merely referred to the claim of the barons to rule their own domains independently of the king's sheriffs and judges—a very unpleasant "liberty" for the serfs, we may be sure. With the decay of the feudal system it regulated, the Charter dropped out of men's minds, and by the Tudor period it had been so completely forgotten that Shakespeare wrote "The Life and Death of King John" without even mentioning it. But when the struggle between Parliament and the Stuart kings broke out, the parliamentary leaders dragged it out again, for some of its provisions seemed to confirm their claims against the monarchy. Clauses XII and XIV, for instance, merely referred to the Great Council of tenants-in-chief, but they were now taken as laying down that there must be "no taxation without representation." Again, privileges promised to "freemen" were not meant to apply to an age in which everybody was free. Thus the Charter was erroneously supposed by the "Whigs" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to authorise parliamentary control over the government and freedom from arbitrary imprisonment for all Englishmen; and it was a great support for their arguments. For we English always like to appeal to precedent, to feel that we are merely confirming the rights which our ancestors enjoyed "in the good old days."



*75. King John comes to a Bad End*

Of course, John had signed the Charter merely to gain time. He had no intention of carrying it out, and he at once appealed to the Pope against it. Innocent was annoyed with the barons for ignoring his position as feudal overlord of England, and he wanted the help of the King in a great Crusade which he was planning. He therefore annulled the Charter. The last clause of it authorised a committee of twenty-five barons to see that the King carried it out, and to take arms against him if he failed to do so. When the twenty-five now proceeded to fulfil this function the Pope instructed Langton to excommunicate them. Langton refused to do so, and armed rebellion broke out again. Thereupon, Innocent announced another of his minor "crusades," and offered remission of sins to any French knights who would go to the support of a vassal of the Holy See.

At first things went badly for the barons in the hostilities that followed. They lost the guidance of Langton, who was threatened with suspension by the Pope and went to Rome to try to make his peace. John laid waste the countryside round London and in the north, where the estates of the leading members of the opposition lay. This may seem an extraordinary method of warfare for a king fighting within his own realm, but John was no ordinary king, and his tactics were certainly successful. The barons were reduced to the desperate step of offering the English crown to Prince Louis, the eldest son of Philip Augustus. This action brings home to us that the feeling of patriotism was as yet in a very early stage of development. All the members of the ruling caste in England were as French as King Philip—or as King John himself, for that matter—in speech, manners, dress, ideas.

Ready as Philip was to carry on his feud with John, he did not like to offend the Pope by personally invading a papal possession; but he evaded this difficulty by letting his son accept the invitation and pretending that this was done against his wishes. A French expedition landed in England in May 1216, and for some months the country was a theatre of war. John was conducting his campaign with considerable skill and

success, when he was suddenly taken ill and died, just after he had lost the greater part of his baggage in trying to take a short cut across the Wash. It was said that his death was due to eating too many peaches and drinking too much new cider. If this is true, he died as he had lived, insisting childishly on having his own way, regardless of the consequences.

## QUESTIONS

(1) *Write a character-sketch of King John, illustrating the traits you mention from events in his career.*

~~(2)~~ *Why do we call the Charter of 1215 "Great" ?*

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Reign of Henry III

(1216-1272)

*The long reign of Henry III passed through three distinct phases. During the first of these the King was a child, and the government was in the hands of a succession of regents ; during the second he misruled the country, himself under the influence of foreign counsellors ; during the third a revolt of the nobles against this misrule led to the setting up of a baronial oligarchy, and an important constitutional experiment.*

#### 76. *The King's Minority*

After John's death the rebel barons and their French allies continued the war against his heir, the nine-years-old *Henry III* ; but they were now playing a losing game. England, as we have seen, had become a fief of the Pope, whose authority was represented by a wise and statesmanlike legate (*i.e.* papal ambassador) named Cardinal Gualo. Under his guidance it was arranged that William Marshall, the old Earl of Pembroke, should preside over the Curia Regis, with Peter des Roches, Bishop of Winchester, as guardian of the boy-King, and Hubert de Burgh as Justiciar. These magnates immediately re-issued the Charter, as an indication that they intended to amend the misrule of the late king—a wise stroke of policy which undermined the opposition. And they had two other circumstances in their favour. Firstly, the young King was innocent of his father's crimes. Secondly, the government had at its back the spiritual power of the Papacy, and Cardinal Gualo authorised its defenders to wear the red cross of crusaders. Prince Louis could make no

headway against such odds, and his men were routed by Earl Marshall in the streets of Lincoln. When he tried to bring reinforcements over from France his transports were destroyed off Sandwich by a fleet under the command of Hubert de Burgh—the first naval victory in English history. The Pretender's position was now hopeless, and he made the *Treaty of Kingston* (1217), by which he withdrew both his claims and his army. The young King being now safe upon his throne, the legate went back to Rome, and William Marshall spent the last few years of his life in re-settling the country with the aid of Langton and de Burgh.

When he died, in 1219, there ensued a struggle for power between two parties. On the one side was Hubert de Burgh, supported by Archbishop Langton; on the other was the new papal legate, supported by Peter des Roches. The rivalry soon took on the character of a contest between English and foreign influences. For the loss of the French provinces was now beginning to have its effect, and national feeling was coming into existence. Men like Langton and de Burgh, though they spoke French as their mother tongue, felt that des Roches and his Poitevin friends were interlopers who ought not to be drawing revenues from English lands. In 1227 the Justiciar influenced the King to announce that, being now nineteen years of age, he could dispense with a guardian. Des Roches, baffled and resentful, went off to Palestine on crusade, leaving his rival in possession of the field.

### 77. *The Great Justiciar*

For the next five years de Burgh ruled England, but he had a very thankless task. He had two great difficulties to contend with. The first of these was the character of the King. Henry was a sincerely devout, amiable young man of blameless private life; but he was vain, weak, and obstinate. His capacities, both as ruler and soldier, were extremely limited, and he lacked even the saving common sense to realise this. Always dependent on some stronger will and subtler brain than his own, he was petulant and ungrateful towards those who relieved him of the burdens he was unable to bear himself. Such a man was at

the mercy of astute adventurers, and de Burgh found it impossible to keep him to a steady line of policy.

The Justiciar's second trouble was a chronic shortness of money. The growth of the royal power, which had done so much during the past century and a half to give England the blessings of internal peace, involved the government in increasing expenditure; yet its only regular sources of revenue were the traditional feudal dues. In a country where the great tenants-in-chief were semi-independent rulers, the suzerain could be expected to "live of his own"—that is to say, on his income as a feudal overlord; but in England, where the King's government really governed, this had become impossible. The real facts of the situation are much clearer to us than they were to contemporaries; and when special aids and scutages were repeatedly demanded from landowners, and pretexts found for collecting them from townsfolk and the freemen of the manors, a general spirit of resentment and resistance grew up.

And just at the time when the country was groaning under these exactions the Pope was demanding revenue on an unheard-of scale from the English Church. The Papacy was now engaged in the last phase of its long contest with the Empire. The protagonists were the fiery old Pope Gregory IX and the Emperor Frederick II, "The Wonder of the World," a man of the most amazing vigour and independence of mind. Frederick owed his Imperial Crown to Innocent III, but he refused to admit that this gave the Papacy any authority over him; and his possession of the kingdom of Sicily (which included all southern Italy) made him a dangerous enemy to the Papal See. In order to oppose him the Pope needed every penny he could lay his hands on, and this fact soon began to have its reactions in England. By the practice known as making "provisions," English benefices were reserved to be filled by the Pope, which enabled him to sell them to the highest bidders—sometimes to foreigners who drew the revenues without even coming to England to carry out the duties. Furthermore, a tenth of all ecclesiastical revenues was demanded by the Papacy. So hotly was this latter exaction resented that a band of knights under one Robert Thweng waylaid the papal couriers, took the money from them, and gave it to the poor.

For all these accumulated grievances Hubert de Burgh became the scapegoat. The barons detested him for his ruthlessness in revenue-collecting and for the wealth and power which he had managed to concentrate in his own hands. The King blamed him for the ill-success of military expeditions to France, Wales, and Ireland. He was accused of encouraging the depredations of Thweng. Finally, Peter des Roches came back from the crusade and regained the favour of his former ward, who was already becoming restive at being overshadowed by his great minister.

In July 1232 Henry mustered up his courage to dismiss Hubert from his service, accusing him of converting public moneys to his own use. He never really cleared himself of the charge, but he was the first royal minister since the Conquest to make patriotism a principle, and to our modern ideas this is a virtue which covers a multitude of sins. Even the smith who was ordered to rivet irons on him refused to fetter "the man who had restored England to the English." He spent the rest of his days in honourable captivity.

### 78. *The Personal Rule of Henry III*

We have now come to the central period of Henry's long reign—the quarter of a century between 1232 and 1258. The King declared after the fall of de Burgh that he would henceforth be his own chief minister, but this meant that the government became the prey of foreign favourites. For Henry did not share the insular feeling that was growing up among his subjects—he always looked upon himself as the rightful ruler of half of France, and was always planning to win back that lost heritage. During the first four years of the King's "independence" the chief part in the government was played by the Poitevin friends of des Roches, who came flocking back again as soon as de Burgh was out of the way. But in 1236 the King married Eleanor of Provence, who gained a great influence over his mind and installed in office a number of her own countrymen; and the next twenty years were full of petty strife between these rival cliques for the spoils of office and power.

The one constant feature of the King's policy was his sub-

servience to the Papacy—the result partly of his personal piety and partly of his gratitude to the power which had secured him on the throne in his boyhood. Hitherto English kings had sought to check papal aggression, but as there was now a close alliance between King and Pope, the English Church was exposed to the full force of papal ambitions. On one occasion a Pope promised a party of Italian supporters the next three hundred English benefices that fell vacant! The growing resentment of native Churchmen to this sort of thing was focused by one of the most striking figures among medieval Englishmen—the bold and brilliant *Robert Grossteste* (1175–1253), Bishop of Lincoln. He was one of the founders of Oxford University, where he was equally distinguished as scholar, scientist, teacher, writer, and organiser. He then became a model bishop, and might have done great things for the nation if he had become Archbishop of Canterbury. But fate had other less congenial work for him, and we remember him chiefly for his vigorous opposition to the corrupt demands of the Papacy and the misrule of the foreign friends of the King. So great was his reputation, not only in England but in Europe generally, that neither King nor Pope dared to silence him.

Naturally, the King was even less able to cope with financial difficulties than de Burgh had been; and those difficulties were aggravated by his love of display, his utter disregard for the value of money, and his grandiose schemes of foreign conquest—now unrestrained by the old Justiciar's common sense. In 1242 he supported a rebellion of the nobles of Poitou against the King of France; but he was crushingly defeated at the battle of *Taillebourg*.

The English barons bitterly resented being called upon to support such ill-conducted enterprises in what they now felt to be “foreign parts”; but for a long time their resistance lacked the leadership which the clergy had found in Grossteste. *Simon de Montfort*, Earl of Leicester, who was destined ultimately to play this part, was at first merely one of the King's foreign favourites. His father, of the same name, had gained a high position by leading a papal “crusade” to exterminate the Albigenses, a religious sect in the south of France which had thrown off the supremacy of the Pope. The

younger Simon was one of the last French nobles to be the hereditary possessor of an English earldom. He came to England and married the King's sister, but quarrelled with his royal brother-in-law over personal matters, and in 1240 went off to Palestine, where he won a great reputation both as soldier and statesman. He returned strengthened in character and broadened in mind, and began to make common cause with the barons against the King's misrule. His final split with Henry came in connection with the governorship of Gascony. That province had been for some years a chaos of rebellion and civil war, and the King promised de Montfort a free hand there for seven years if he would undertake to restore order. De Montfort carried out the commission with signal vigour and success, but at a cost of much severity and a considerable expenditure of money. Henry recalled him long before the seven years were up, and henceforth the breach between them was irreparable.

Meanwhile, the King had become practically bankrupt. His debts were so enormous that he was afraid to show his face outdoors. He sold the royal palace, the crown jewels, public offices, and private privileges. He ceased to pay judges and officers, who had to recoup themselves by taking bribes from the public. He tried to raise money for a crusade on which he did not intend to go. Yet, incredible as it may seem, he now promised the Pope a subsidy equivalent to the whole revenue of the Crown for a year and a half! The story of this amazing transaction is as follows. The Emperor, Frederick II, had died in 1250, leaving the Papacy master of the situation. Pope Innocent IV offered his dominions to two relatives of the most faithful supporter of the Holy See—our Henry III. The King's brother, Richard, Duke of Cornwall, became Emperor—which meant a drain of money from English tenants to bribe faithless German princes to accept him. Worse still, Henry's second son, Edmund, was nominated to the throne of Sicily, provided that the King would meet all the expenses of a war against Frederick's heirs and would pay an annual tribute. The prospect of so much glory and papal patronage quite turned Henry's weak head. He summoned the Great Council and presented Edmund to it dressed in Sicilian costume, with a



request for subsidies amounting to about £2,000,000 in modern money! But the unsympathetic magnates were not in the least impressed by the prince's fancy dress, they declined to provide any money, and the whole project fell through.

### 79. *The Provisions of Oxford*

For some years after the Sicilian fiasco the discontent continued to grow. All classes were sick of the foreign adventurers who swarmed at the Court, of interventions in foreign affairs which had no connection with English interests, and of the ceaseless arrival of papal agents in quest of money; but nobody took a definite stand against these grievances.

Then, suddenly the explosion came. The King summoned a meeting of the Great Council to provide the means for dealing with Llewelyn II, the ruler of North Wales, who had taken advantage of the government's weakness to overrun the border lands. A little knot of barons put their heads together under the leadership of de Montfort and declared that the only remedy for the situation was to take the government out of the King's hands into those of the Council. Henry, much perturbed, adjourned the meeting, but this only gave the malcontents time to mature their plans; and when the Council met again, some months later, at Oxford, the barons came to it in full armour, to convince the King that they meant business. A feudal king was helpless against the united opposition of his tenants-in-chief, and Henry had no option but to submit to the humiliating terms which the magnates now brought forward. By *The Provisions of Oxford* (1258) the whole business of government was taken over by a committee of fifteen barons, who were to give an account of their actions three times a year to another committee of twelve. This was a much more drastic reform than had been expected, and people called the assembly which framed it *The Mad Parliament*. As a matter of fact, that assembly was not what we should to-day call a parliament at all. It consisted of a group of feudal nobles intent chiefly on setting up an oligarchical government which would rule in their own interests.

During the next few years the committee settled several outstanding questions of foreign policy. By the *Treaty of Paris*

(1259) all claim to the Angevin dominions was definitely withdrawn; satisfactory terms were arranged with Llewelyn; and the candidature of Prince Edmund for Sicily was cancelled. But soon quarrels broke out among the leading barons. De Montfort was not satisfied with the Provisions of Oxford as a permanent system. Further reforms had been promised at Oxford, and he wanted to see those reforms carried out. Under the influence of his friend Grossteste he had learnt to take a much broader view of public affairs than any of the other barons—he believed that no government can be permanently successful that is not based on general consent, especially in matters of taxation. The arbitrary rule of a group of self-seeking nobles was in his eyes hardly better than the arbitrary rule of the King. For a time he had the friendship and support of the heir-apparent, the brilliant young Prince Edward; but later on the prince was reconciled to his father and put fresh vigour into the royalist party. Henry took advantage of the divisions among his enemies and of his own growing strength to repudiate the Provisions, and an armed conflict seemed inevitable. Then both sides agreed to refer the matter to the arbitration of King Louis IX of France. Montfort must have lacked confidence in the strength of his supporters, or he would never have made such an agreement, for it was obvious that a king would be prejudiced in favour of kingly power against a feudal rebellion. By the *Mise of Amiens* (1264) Louis simply obliterated the Provisions of Oxford. De Montfort had sworn in advance to accept the award, but he now declared that his duty to the cause he had taken up outweighed his duty to keep his oath, and he prepared to resist the King by force. He was supported by some of the younger generation among the nobles, by many of the “gentry,” and by the City of London, but at first the royal forces under the command of Prince Edward carried all before them. They devastated the Earl’s estates, took two of his sons prisoner, and swept on to the south coast to cover the landing of a mercenary army which had been collected on the Continent by the Queen. When de Montfort followed them up on the Sussex Downs with an army much inferior both in numbers and quality, including some thousands of London militia, the royalists were recklessly confident of victory. Prince Edward and his gallant knights

charged the wretched Londoners and pursued them for miles across the Downs; but when they returned some hours later they found that in the meantime Earl Simon had won the battle and captured the King (*Battle of Lewes*, 1264). The luckless Henry was compelled by the *Mise of Lewes* to re-issue the Great Charter, to accept once more the Provisions of Oxford, and to hand his son over to the Earl as a hostage for the observance of these terms.

### 80. "The Good Earl Simon"

Prince Edward was imprisoned in Hereford Castle, and the King himself was a captive in all but name. Earl Simon called a Parliament which modified the *Mise of Lewes*, placing the royal power in the hands of a committee of nine barons nominated by himself; but he had no real chance of putting his plans for the better government of the realm into practice. His "reign" lasted little more than a year, and during the whole of this time his attention was taken up with keeping at bay the opposition, which included the foreign friends of the King and Queen, most of the English barons, and the higher clergy. He had the enthusiastic support of the townsfolk (especially the Londoners), of many of the yeoman-class, of the Oxford students, and of the lower clergy; but, if it came to actual blows, the military power of the great nobles would be far more effective than any forces that could be created out of such elements as these.

It was in the hope of strengthening himself against his enemies that at the beginning of 1265 he summoned his famous Parliament. Of the greater tenants-in-chief only a score attended it, for by this time most of them refused to recognise his authority; but he also ordered two knights to be elected in every shire-court, and two representatives to be sent from each of the towns which he knew to be favourable to his cause. Elected knights had attended Great Councils before this, and elected burgesses had long been sent to transact business with the King's officers on behalf of their fellow-townsmen; but what gave Montfort's Parliament its importance in the eyes of historians is that it was the first which included *both* the classes

out of which the future House of Commons was built up. But it was no House of Commons that met in 1265. The members did not represent the nation, but only Montfort's party. He himself had no idea that he was laying the foundations of a parliamentary system which was, centuries later, to be imitated in every country of the civilised world. His chief motive in summoning this assembly was to have a chance of talking to a representative gathering of his supporters; and even so, it is probable that many of his invitations were declined, for it was a troublesome, expensive, and thankless business to attend such assemblies.

Perhaps the most notable result of Montfort's Parliament was the impression that it made on the mind of Prince Edward, who was watching these proceedings from his prison. He naturally resented the way in which de Montfort set aside the royal authority; but he fully realised that the old system of government must be reformed, and the time was not far distant when he was to show that he had profited by the experiments of his enemy.

The prince's imprisonment was not very strict, and in May (1265) he escaped. He put himself at the head of the opposition, which was doubled in energy by his presence. De Montfort went to attack him in the west country with what forces he could muster, but was caught at a disadvantage between the Severn and the Avon, defeated, and slain (*Battle of Evesham*, August 1265).

It is not easy to determine how far Simon de Montfort was a noble hero, and how far it was mere lust for power that inspired him. He certainly antagonised most of the men of rank with whom he came into contact by his high-handed dictatorial manner. But the strongest evidence in his favour is the affection which was felt for him by the common people, especially by the lower ranks of the clergy. A chronicler says of him that "he stood like an impregnable tower for the liberties of the land." To his humble admirers he was always "the good Earl Simon," and his memory was kept green for a century and more by the belief that miracles were worked at his tomb. No man gains such a reputation without deserving it, at least in some measure.

The last seven years of the long reign of Henry III passed in peace and quiet. The King was growing old and left the government more and more in the hands of Prince Edward. The lessons of the last few years were not altogether lost either on father or son; the grievances which had produced the Barons' Wars were redressed, or at any rate reduced; and the Prince served an apprenticeship which was to help him to become one of the best and wisest of English kings.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *In what ways did Henry III show his lack of capacity as a ruler?*

(2) *Estimate the claims of Simon de Montfort to be considered a great statesman.*

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Zenith of the Middle Ages

*Nowadays Europe consists of a number of national states under governments elected by their citizens. In the Middle Ages the position was very different. The Roman tradition of a universal authority still lingered in men's minds; and Emperor and Pope both claimed to exercise some part, at least, of it. National monarchies were gradually taking shape; but over most of Europe the actual functions of government were carried out for the most part by the nobles and the higher clergy. Individuals counted for little; the average man lived his whole life as a member of some community—a manor, a monastery, an order of knighthood, a trade-gild.*

*This medieval form of society reached its zenith in the thirteenth century; and in this chapter we shall notice some of its most striking features.*

#### 81. *The Papal Theocracy*

The true heir to the Roman Empire was the Catholic Church. For one thing, she enjoyed a similar universality. Her priests used the same ritual in the same language all over Western Europe, and were all subject to the same supreme authority, who ruled in the city which had for centuries been the capital of the civilised world. Her monopoly of education—for very few laymen could even read or write—gave her a tremendous hold over men's minds. Moreover, she offered a career of power, fame, and wealth to the talents of any young man of ability, without distinction of social class or nationality, and she might thus almost be said to enjoy a monopoly of brains.

A universal organisation for the preservation of religion, morality, knowledge, and peace by co-ordinating men's instinctive longing for these blessings—this is one of the grandest ideas that ever entered the human soul. In the course of seven or eight centuries of struggle the Popes established themselves in control of this organisation, and on the whole they used their power wisely and well. It was largely due to their influence that Europe emerged from the barbarism of the Dark Ages into medieval civilisation. But meanwhile another power had arisen which likewise claimed to derive universal authority from the Cæsars. This was the so-called Holy Roman Empire. The early claimants to this position—Charlemagne, and then, after an interval, Otto the Great—had been encouraged and supported by Popes who wanted the help of great German rulers in their struggles with their Italian enemies. Hence arose a general idea that the power of Rome was still in existence, shared between Emperor (for political matters) and Pope (for religious matters). But the Emperor's authority over the other rulers was always rather shadowy, especially as regards England, France, and Spain; and the harmonious working in double harness of Emperor and Pope did not last very long. The Popes began to claim that their spiritual authority, being derived from Christ Himself, made them supreme over all the princes of this world. This brought several of them into conflict with kings of England, as we have seen; but these disagreements were only a faint echo of the great recurrent contest between Emperors and Popes which raged off and on for two centuries, from the time of Hildebrand and Henry IV to that of Innocent IV and Frederick II. With the death of Frederick II in 1250 the struggle ended in a victory for the Papacy; and Europe seemed in a fair way to become a "theocracy"—a state ruled by a priesthood.

But in the course of the contest the Papacy had been driven to take steps which injured its character and weakened its claims to men's obedience. Enormous wealth had come into the possession of the Church, much of it bequeathed by kings and nobles who hoped thus to atone for their sins; but the revenues of this mostly came into the hands of bishops and abbots. The Papacy itself was comparatively poor—at any

rate, its income was not nearly enough to pay for its ambitious policy of financing crusades and carrying on contests with great potentates. The Popes were, therefore, compelled to stoop to all sorts of unworthy means of gaining money. We have already mentioned one of the most scandalous of these expedients—the abuse of “provisions” (§ 77), which resulted in the promotion of unworthy men to high spiritual authority. The Church was in danger of forgetting that the real purpose of her existence was to establish the Kingdom of God in men’s hearts; she began to act as if her main duty were to make herself the dominant power in this world. Another aspect of the same deterioration was the persecution which now began to be a regular part of her activities. We cannot imagine her Founder slaughtering Albigenses for neglecting His teaching, as Innocent III did; or establishing a Holy Inquisition to hunt down and punish heresy, as Innocent IV did.

Nevertheless, throughout the thirteenth century the authority of the Church was hardly questioned, even though individuals might protest at the drain of money to Rome or at the abuses that were creeping into the exercise of papal authority.

### 82. *Monks and Friars*

The political power of the Popes was only one aspect of the tremendous influence which the Church exercised over the minds and actions of men. Let us notice some others. (1) By *The Truce of God* she prohibited all acts of violence against clergymen and women, and forbade private warfare altogether between Thursdays and Sundays, inclusive. Of course, it was impossible to enforce this regulation at all times and places, but the fact that the Church even attempted to do so, with none but spiritual weapons at her command, is evidence of a power we can hardly conceive of to-day. (2) A similar institution was *The Right of Sanctuary*, by which a fugitive whose life was being sought—whether justly or unjustly—could not be touched if he took refuge in a church. His pursuers sometimes surrounded the building and starved him out; but the ecclesiastical authorities were often able to save him, and to give him, even if guilty of



some crime, an opportunity of fleeing into exile. (3) Again, by making the initiation to knighthood a religious ceremony, the Church caused the fighting man to feel himself a member of an international brotherhood, sworn to protect the weak, to honour women, and to be generous to enemies. Unfortunately, very few made much serious attempt to live up to the ideals of chivalry; yet the mere existence of such an ideal must have done something to raise the tone of medieval life.

Moreover, it would be difficult to find any modern counterpart for the waves of religious enthusiasm which during the Middle Ages passed over Europe and swept men wholesale into acts of personal devotion and self-sacrifice. Thousands of nobles impoverished themselves by selling their estates to go on Crusade. And even in the lawless reign of Stephen there was hardly a great tenant-in-chief in England who did not help to found one of the new Cistercian monasteries which were springing up all over the country. The monastic spirit itself, which inspired men to cut themselves off from worldly cares and pleasures and give themselves up to labour, discipline, and prayer, is comparatively rare in our days, when life is so much more secure and has such a variety of interests and activities to offer.

That spirit was at its highest and best during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The "rules" of the various Orders of monks differed in detail, but there was a general resemblance among them all. Monasteries were usually built in the form of a quadrangle. On the north side of it was the chapel, the most elaborate and beautiful part of the buildings, in which the monks met for worship every few hours all through the day and night. On the south side were the refectory and the kitchen, and over these the dormitories; on the east the Chapter House, where the general affairs of the monastery were discussed; while on the west were the quarters of the lay brethren, who carried on the menial work. But the centre of the monastic life was the cloisters, paved and covered, which ran round the inside of the quadrangle. Here the monks studied and wrote up their chronicles and copied their manuscripts and held the monastery school. Much of the revenue was devoted to feeding the poor and to the entertainment of travellers—from whom, incidentally,

they gathered most of the news for their chronicles. In most Orders some part of the day was spent in manual labour—in building, or in the fields, or in the cultivation of herbs and kitchen vegetables. The monks themselves elected their abbot, who organised the work and administration and appointed various officials, such as the cellarer, the almoner, and the sacristan.

During the thirteenth century an entirely new form of religious life grew up—the *Friars*. The Spanish St. Dominic and the Italian St. Francis of Assisi, who both lived at the beginning of that century, founded two orders of priests who spent their lives in going out into the highways and byways and carrying religion to those who needed it most. Monks were engaged in saving their own souls in convents, bishops were full of politics and worldly cares, village priests never moved outside their manor-parishes and were often ignorant and narrow-minded men. But the friars made it their business to preach the Gospel to the poor, to bring the sacraments within reach of the neglected, to minister comfort and healing to the diseased. They wandered about, relying for sustenance on chance hospitality or even on begging, and taking as their ideal the literal imitation of Christ's life on earth. They built their simple little chapels with their own hands, wore the roughest clothes, walked barefoot at all seasons of the year, slept without mattress or pillow, yet radiated joy and hope wherever they went. Some of their best work was done in the squalid and insanitary little towns, the inhabitants of which were for the most part neglected by the parish organisation of the Church.

Of the two orders the *Dominicans*, or Black Friars, were given control of the Inquisition by Pope Innocent IV, and devoted a good deal of their energies to rooting out heresy. Perhaps it was for this reason that in England (where there were very few heretics for them to hunt) they never gained such a hold as the gentle *Franciscans*, the Grey Friars. Unfortunately, it was not long before the self-forgetful idealism with which the movement started was stifled by its own success, for admirers insisted on endowing the friars with property; and they began to devote too much of their attention on quarrelling with other types of the clergy who resented their "interference." Nevertheless, they

were one of the most notable manifestations of the religious spirit of the time.

### 83. *The Cathedral Builders*

We still have around us evidence of that spirit in the buildings which it inspired. The abbeys and cathedrals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, designed and carried through to the glory of God, must have involved a stupendous expenditure, both in materials and in effort of mind and body.\*

Those centuries saw a remarkable development in the science and art of church building. The invention of ribbed vaulting, crossing diagonally, enabled the architect to concentrate the outward thrust of his roof at particular points of the side-walls, and at these points most of the strain could be taken by buttresses. Thus the intervening spaces of the walls, between the buttresses, no longer needed to be thick and solid. They could be carried up much higher, and could be pierced by large windows. These windows were used not merely to let in light, but to inspire religious ideas by means of stained glass. In days when the vast majority of men could not read these pictures had an influence over their minds out of all proportion to what they have over ours to-day. And the invention of criss-cross vaulting led to another equally important result. The semicircles formed by the diagonal ribs were much higher than those of ribs from side to side, and the consequence was that these latter took the form of a pointed arch instead of a round one. This "lancet-shape" was copied in doors and windows so as to give unity of design, and it influenced the whole character and effect of the building. The eye of the beholder is no longer, as in Norman churches, kept down along horizontal lines. It is carried upward by lofty piers and windows to the high-pitched roof—everything seems to point heavenward; and on the outside the same effect is produced by towers and spires. An impression of energetic spiritual aspiration has taken the place of the impression of solid, reposeful strength which we feel in looking at older buildings.

This style of architecture is commonly called *Gothic*. The

\* It has been estimated that even with modern mechanical appliances it would cost £500,000,000 to build the cathedrals of France to-day.

word was applied to it at first in contempt, during the seventeenth century; for architects were then influenced solely by "classical" models of ancient Greece, and associated the Goths with all that was barbarous. But nowadays we have learnt to admire these buildings and to see in them the embodiment of the devotional spirit of our ancestors. For people must have felt like that to have built like that, whatever their shortcomings may have been in other directions.

#### 84. *The Universities*

Another remarkable feature of the time was the founding of universities. When the chaos of the Dark Ages gave place to medieval civilisation men had time to think and study again, and the Crusades brought Western Europeans into contact with the Arabs who had preserved some of the writings of the great Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. Man began once more to puzzle over the Universe and his place in it. It was only Churchmen who had the leisure and the knowledge of reading and writing necessary for a life of study; and their freedom of thought and inquiry was somewhat cramped by their anxiety to avoid anything that seemed to contradict Catholic doctrine. *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1226-1274) worked out a system of philosophy which would make the teachings of Aristotle fit in with those of the Church, and in doing so he developed the science of thought which we call "Logic." His writings remain the basis of Catholic theology at the present day. Another new line of mental activity which developed at about the same time was the study of Law—the Civil Law that had been codified under the Roman Emperor Justinian (about A.D. 530), and the Canon Law based on the decrees issued by the Popes and the edicts of General Councils.

It was natural that teachers and students of these subjects should gather in particular places and should organise themselves in corporations. It was natural also that rulers should want to exercise control over these factories of knowledge and opinion, and should therefore grant them privileges. This was the origin of universities. The first to be formed were those at Paris (mainly for Philosophy) and at Bologna (mainly for Law);

but others soon began to spring up all over Europe. There were two reasons for this rapid growth. Firstly, special buildings were not necessary; wherever teachers and taught could find lodgings and lecture-rooms a university could be started. Secondly, they all used the same international language (Latin), which made it easy for a new university to be founded by migration from an older one. Thus, when Henry II quarrelled with the King of France, a group of students came back from Paris and settled at Oxford, whence, a few years later, a similar migration gave birth to a rival university at Cambridge. The scholars consisted of youths—mostly the sons of yeomen or tradesmen, for nobles still considered study beneath their dignity—who lived half-a-dozen in a room, went to lectures in the mornings, and spent their evenings in taverns where they drank and quarrelled and sang students' songs. It was not until about 1260 that the first college (Balliol) was built, in which they could be kept under some sort of discipline. They were all in "minor orders" and so enjoyed the protection of "Benefit of Clergy" (§ 59), but they did not all become priests.

The most famous teacher produced by Oxford during the first year of her existence, apart from Robert Grossteste, whom we have already mentioned (§ 78), was *Roger Bacon*, the most daring thinker of the Middle Ages. He had the courage to tell men that they were ignorant of the world in which they lived, that the way to get to know it better was not to argue logically about statements found in Aristotle and the Bible, but to observe and experiment for themselves. He made remarkable advances both in Physics and Chemistry by his own researches, and is said to have invented the lens. But the Church suspected a taint of heresy in these studies, and Bacon spent most of the latter part of his life in prison.

### 85. *The Merchant Gilds*

Thus in the Middle Ages there were many organisations which claimed the loyalty of individual men in a way that only the national State does nowadays; for there were then no national taxation, no national armies, no national churches, and no national trade-regulations. The manor, the monastery, the

university, are all examples of corporate bodies which absorbed the whole lives of their members. Another striking example was the Merchant Gild.

"Domesday Book" mentions eighty towns, but these were mostly little more than large villages, the inhabitants of which spent the greater part of each week cultivating land in the neighbourhood, and merely came into the town on market days. Only half a dozen of them had walls within which a considerable population lived permanently and gave all their time to manufacture and trade—London (already by far the largest), Bristol, Norwich, York, Winchester, and Southampton. They were nearly all part of the royal domain, and paid market tolls to the king as well as the ordinary feudal dues on the agricultural land which belonged to them. The assessment and collection of these various sums was a troublesome and complicated business, and kings were glad to make agreements by which townsfolk paid a fixed annual sum instead. But who was to be responsible for such payments? The solution of this problem was found in the formation of a "Gild," or corporation of the principal inhabitants, who appointed officials to collect the dues and to take charge of the town affairs generally. The great tenants-in-chief made similar bargains with the larger villages on their estates, especially when they were in urgent need of money to equip themselves for the Crusades; and thus "free boroughs" grew up all over the country. But the king had a great advantage over the barons in that he alone was in a position to grant the most valued of privileges—exemption from interference by the officials of the government.

The Merchant Gilds developed into powerful corporations, which often bought from the king the further right to exclude any "stranger" from setting up in business in their towns unless he joined their Gild—and paid handsomely for sharing its privileges. The word "merchant" did not mean quite what it does to-day. There was much less buying to sell again at a profit in those days. The "merchants" were mostly either working manufacturers—tanners or weavers or dyers—or providers of foodstuffs—bakers, butchers, or fishmongers. Everywhere we see the communal spirit at work. The officers of the Gild saw that the goods supplied by members were up to

## 178 THE ZENITH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

a proper standard of quality and justly measured ; it made itself responsible for debts owing to and by its members and it regulated prices to prevent " profiteering."

Much the same process was going on all over Western Europe, but in Continental countries the citizens had, on the whole, much severer struggles with their overlords before they could gain their independence.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *Compare medieval and modern civilisation :* (a) *As to religion ;* (b) *as to agriculture ;* (c) *as to manufactures.*

(2) *Illustrate " the communal spirit " of the Middle Ages.*

GENERAL QUESTIONS ON BOOK II

(1) *Outline the relations between England and Scotland during this period.*

(2) *To which of the Norman and Angevin kings does the country owe most?*

(3) *Write the imaginary history of a Norman knight given an English manor after the Conquest, and trace the history of his descendants down to 1216.*

(4) *Explain the terms : vassal, fief, land held in villeinage, scutage, suzerain, tenant-in-chief, demesne, mesne-tenant, aids, wardship.*

(5) *Compare William I, Henry II, and John as regards their attitude towards the Church.*

(6) *Trace the changing position of the sheriffs under the Norman and Angevin kings.*

(7) *How did the kings during this period restrain the independence of the baronage?*

(8) *Describe a typical England manor of this period.*

(9) *Write a dialogue between yourself and a person born eight hundred years before you, bringing out the changes in daily life and in ideas which have taken place.*

(10) *Outline the relations between Philip Augustus and successive Kings of England.*

(11) *How did the opposition offered to John differ from that offered to the Norman kings?*

(12) *Trace the origin of (a) Trial by Jury ; (b) Judges on Circuit ; (c) Parliamentary elections.*

(13) *What would have been the effect on England if Hildebrand and his successors had made good their claims in full?*

(14) *"The weakness or wickedness of some kings has done as much as the strength and wisdom of others towards the progress of constitutional liberty." How far does the history of this period bear this out?*



## 180 THE ZENITH OF THE MIDDLE AGES

(15) *Contrast the lives led by parish priest, monk, and friar in the thirteenth century.*

(16) *What was the effect upon England of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket?*

(17) *Compare the struggle between Crown and Church in the reigns of Henry I and II.*

(18) *What were the outstanding features of medieval civilisation?*

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Edward the First as Legislator

(1272-1296)

*We now come to the first King of England since the Conquest to be really English—in name, in spirit, and in policy. His predecessors had been as much concerned for their French dominions as for England; but Edward, though (like all the upper classes of his day) he spoke French as his mother-tongue, devoted himself entirely to English interests. Chief of these was the re-organisation of the law.*

#### 86. *Every Inch a King*

*Edward I* seemed born and bred to be a king. As heir-apparent he had undergone valuable apprenticeship for a future ruler: He had enjoyed the friendship of great men, he had travelled widely, he had suffered for the evil results of his father's misrule; and he was one of those people who can profit by experience.

Physically, he was a fine specimen of manhood, tall and sinewy, a splendid horseman, an adept at all manly exercises. His character was equally admirable. Recklessly brave in personal conflict, he developed into a resourceful commander. He was a model of all the domestic virtues—a good son, a devoted husband, an affectionate father, a loyal brother. With all the quick-tempered impetuosity of the Angevins, he had learnt to ride his passions on the curb. Though by nature proud, ambitious, and domineering, he had none of that contempt for the humbler classes which disfigured so much of the "chivalry"

of the day, and could unbend with high good humour. He prided himself on being a man of his word—*Pactum serva* ("Keep troth") was his motto. He was sincerely religious and was a generous supporter of charities, monasteries, the friars, the universities, cathedral building; and though he was himself more of a man of action than a thinker, he knew how to appreciate and use the brains of others.

He first learnt of his father's death when he was in southern Italy on his way back from *The Eighth Crusade*, in which he had played a distinguished part. He had made arrangements for this contingency before leaving England, and so smoothly did these arrangements work that he did not hasten his return, but continued to journey at his leisure. Everywhere he was received with high honour, both as a reigning king and as a crusader. He was met in Provence by a number of English knights, and accepted with them a challenge to a tournament against the knights of Burgundy, in the course of which he won great renown by his prowess with lance and sword. He received the homage of the magnates of Gascony, the last French province remaining to the English Crown, and later visited the King of France at Paris to do homage for it as tenant-in-chief. He did not arrive in England until the middle of 1274, nearly two years after his accession. He then addressed himself at once to the task which he had long determined to tackle as soon as he came to the throne—the reform of the law.

### 87. "The English Justinian"

We have seen that the foundations of the English legal and administrative systems had been laid by Henry II; but the time had now come when that monarch's "Assizes" and "Constitutions" required overhauling. The ninety years since his death had seen all sorts of developments in social conditions, and the principles of legal science had been further studied in the new universities. Thus, Edward's work was to amplify, shape, and define the laws of England. He has been called "The English Justinian," after the Byzantine Emperor who caused the Roman law to be codified. Of course, Edward did not quite do that—nobody ever has done

## THE GREAT LAW-GIVER

it ; but he certainly left behind him a far clearer, more adequate, and more orderly system than he found. He had himself a good general grasp of what was required, but in matters of detail he owed much to a group of able lawyer-ministers, especially *Robert Burnell*, his adviser since the days of Evesham, whom he now rewarded with the bishopric of Bath and Wells.

The general object which he set before himself was much the same as that of Henry I and II—to strengthen the power of the government and to bring its justice within the reach of all. Of course, he did not dream of overthrowing feudalism, or of weakening the independence of the Church within its own sphere ; he accepted both these institutions without question as the pillars of society. But he was determined that neither of them should come between himself and his subjects in the government of the country.

As soon as his first Parliament met he laid before it a measure which became known as *The First Statute of Westminster* (1275). We may summarise this by saying that it brought *Magna Carta* up to date. Judges had unfairly refused bail to prisoners ; debts to the Exchequer had been collected twice by royal officials ; feudal chiefs had taken the law into their own hands against their tenants, had wasted the lands of which they were guardians, and had levied unlawful tolls on wayfarers. All these abuses and many others of the same sort were now corrected.

Then followed *The Statute of Gloucester* (1278), which aimed at a more uniform system of justice over the whole country. We have seen how tenants-in-chief always liked to exclude the King's sheriffs and judges from their domains, how they had chafed at Henry II's restrictions on their right to hold their own private law-courts, and how they had wrested from King John a recognition of these "liberties" (§ 74). Many such private jurisdictions had been usurped under the feeble sway of Henry III, and disputes were now constantly arising between royal officers and local magnates. This statute authorised a commission to go round to inquire by what right (*Quo Warranto*) such powers were claimed. The barons greatly resented this, for in most cases they had no documentary evidence for their privileges. There is a well-known story that when the old

Earl Warenne was asked for his warrant he pointed to his rusty sword; what his ancestors had won with it at Hastings he would maintain with it, even against the King. So fierce was the opposition that Edward dropped the idea of depriving the barons of any rights that had been exercised before the time of Richard I, and contented himself with abolishing those that had arisen since that date.

Then he attacked the pretensions of the Church. People were constantly bequeathing land to monasteries, friaries, and so forth, which robbed the King's government of feudal revenue. For these corporations never died, and thus never had to pay "reliefs" or "wardships"; nor did the property ever "escheat" to the Crown for lack of heirs; and, furthermore, the Church often evaded the scutages payable in lieu of military service. *The Statute of Mortmain*\* (1279) prevented the process from going any further, by prohibiting all such grants or bequests except with the King's express permission.

The next new law to be passed, *The Statute of Acton Burnell* (1283), was designed to encourage the development of commerce and industry. It enabled merchants to enforce payment of debts by providing that persons who could not or would not pay their debts were to forfeit their property, even if it consisted of landed estates, and might even be imprisoned if they continued to default.

### 88. *Three Great Statutes*

The year 1285 was the most productive in all Edward's legislative career. *The Second Statute of Westminster* was in the main devoted to improvements in the working of earlier laws, especially the Statutes of Gloucester and Mortmain; but the first of its clauses, commonly known as *De Donis Conditionalibus*, became a landmark in the development of English social system. It provided that estates could be "entailed," whereafter no holder of them could sell them for his profit or forfeit them for his crimes. He enjoyed the use of them during his lifetime merely; after his death they passed intact to his heir. The object was to ensure that baronial families should have adequate estates to support them. It was contrary to the

\* The name refers to the "dead hand" of the Church.

general trend of Edward's policy thus to foster baronial independence, and the clause seems to have been wrung from him by the nobles as the price of their support for the rest of the statute. It created much confusion and hardship until later generations of lawyers found means to nullify it in practice. But it had an important indirect effect upon our subsequent national development ; for it created a tendency for family estates to go to eldest sons intact, so that younger sons were driven to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Hence, the English aristocracy provided in a later age plenty of adventurous spirits to act as leaders in war, commerce, exploration, and colonisation.

*The Statute of Winchester*, passed in the same year, provided for the defence of the realm and for the protection of property. It arranged for the pursuit of criminals from one district to another, it ordered towns to close their gates at sunset and appoint night-watchmen ; it required every man to be in possession of arms and armour corresponding to his rank and occupation. This last regulation was an extension of the *Distraint of Knighthood* (1278), which compelled all holders of property of an annual value of £20 or more (the equivalent of £400 or £500 nowadays) to join the King's forces as mounted men when called upon.

A few months later the King tackled the thorny problem of the relationship between Church and State, by issuing the famous writ, *Circumspecte Agatis* ("mind what you are about"). This is sometimes spoken of as a statute, but it was really no more than an instruction to judges. It gave an exact list of the classes of case that might be dealt with in the Courts Christian, limiting them to such matters as marriages, wills, penances, and tithes. It took a broad and statesmanlike view of the matter, and was accepted by the ecclesiastical authorities without demur.

Five years later came the most important of all Edward's laws, *The Third Statute of Westminster* (1290), better known as *Quia Emptores*. This enacted that when a landholder parted with any part of his estates the purchaser was to do feudal service for it not to the seller but to the seller's overlord. The immediate object of King and barons in passing it was merely to keep a firm grip on their own rights ; but it led in the

course of time to two unforeseen results of much greater importance : (1) By greatly increasing the number of tenants-in-chief it encouraged the development of the "gentry," or lesser nobles, who played such a vital part in the subsequent history of England. (2) It struck a deadly blow at the feudal system itself, for the Crown could not exact military service from such a multiplicity of individual manor-holders, and was compelled more and more to content itself with obtaining dues in money from them.

It will be noticed that most of these laws were corollaries of those of Henry II : the Statute of Winchester corresponds to the Assize of Arms, *Quia Emptores* to Henry's anti-feudal measures ; Mortmain and *Circumspecte Agatis* to the Constitutions of Clarendon. Edward's administration of justice was also a development of Henry's. The courts which sat at Westminster Hall were now divided into three : (1) The Court of King's Bench, which heard criminal cases (for the idea had by this time arisen that a person who committed a crime was not merely injuring an individual, but breaking "The King's Peace") ; (2) The Court of Exchequer, which dealt with cases concerning the royal revenue ; and (3) The Court of Common Pleas, in which one private person might sue another. And the arrangements for "Justices in Eyre" were also revised and brought up to date, the country being now divided into four circuits, round each of which a pair of judges were sent three times a year.

### 89. *King Edward's Parliaments*

The development of Parliament under Edward I was quite as important as his legislation. He would himself have been surprised to hear this, for nobody could then foresee how great a part Parliament was destined to play in the history not merely of England, but of our western civilisation generally. And if Edward had realised that the institution he fostered as an adjunct to his kingly power would one day take the government into its own hands, he would have been horrified beyond measure.

His very first Parliament, which met soon after his arrival in England, was more completely representative than any that

had assembled before. De Montfort had summoned some knights and burgesses to his famous parliament of 1264 (§ 80), but this was a mere revolutionary convention of his own partisans. Edward had realised that his enemy's experiment was a success as far as it went, and he was now in a position to carry it out far more thoroughly, by having two knights elected in every shire-court and two burgesses in every borough.

This Parliament of 1275, besides passing the First Statute of Westminster, approved a very important change in the collection of the dues paid to the King on the export of wool. Hitherto these had to be paid "in kind"—*i.e.* a certain proportion of the "fells" had been handed over to the royal officers. Henceforth the value of that proportion was paid in money. This was afterwards referred to as *The Great and Ancient Custom*—whence the word we still use for this form of indirect taxation.

But such very full assemblies as this were exceptional. The King only summoned them on specially important occasions—four times in all in the whole course of his reign. At other times he contented himself with the old Great Council of tenants-in-chief, sometimes adding thereto a certain number of elected knights or burgesses or clergy, just as seemed to him desirable in view of the subject to be discussed. Nearly all his famous statutes were passed at such incomplete assemblies. But "passed" is hardly the right word to use. The laws were the King's laws, decided on and drawn up by himself and his ministers. He made a show of consulting the magnates, but he would never have admitted that their consent was necessary. The great point about his practice is that he was statesman enough to realise that it was to his advantage to make his subjects feel that his interests and theirs were identical—that he was acting for the common weal. Above all, he realised that he would get his subsidies paid more readily—and there was little machinery for compelling people to pay taxes in those days—if the payers understood what the money was wanted for. The meeting of a full Parliament was an opportunity for letting the nation know what the government was doing. The scene at such assemblies must have been something like that when the King's Speech is read at the opening of Parliament nowadays—the King



on his throne, attended by his ministers, the magnates seated before him in their robes, with the commons standing at a respectful distance. The real function of knights and burgesses was not to discuss the measures adopted—they would hardly venture to open their mouths in such august presence—but to go home when the session closed and explain them to their friends and neighbours. And, incidentally, nothing did more to foster the growing sense of national unity than these periodical meetings of men from all parts of the country. It has been well said that England did not make Parliament—Parliament made England.

When he sent out the writs for the Parliament of 1295 the King definitely laid it down that "what concerns all should be approved by all." That assembly, as we shall see in the next chapter, was summoned at a critical moment, when the King was in desperate need of funds. It was afterwards known as *The Model Parliament*, because its constitution was imitated by later kings. From this time onwards a clear distinction begins to be drawn between the magnates who are summoned by name and the lesser nobles who are elected in the shire-courts. Since the elected knights from the shires and the elected burgesses from the towns represented communities, these two classes were drawn together, and in the course of the next century they coalesced to form the House of Commons (*i.e.* of communes). The distinction between nobility and gentry, and the association of the latter with the rising middle class of merchants and manufacturers, had a profound influence on English history. Most notable of all its results, it prevented the growth of an overgrown caste of privileged persons such as blighted the political development of France, Spain, and Germany for centuries. And in this, as in so many other directions, we see that the result of the reign of Edward I was to define and canalise processes that had been going on for a long time in a casual way.

#### 90. *The Expulsion of the Jews*

None of Edward's acts as king did more to win him the respect of contemporaries than his driving the Jews out of the country. These people were debarred by their religion from

all ordinary occupations. A Christian oath was necessary on taking any public office and on joining the Gilds which had a monopoly of trade; while agriculture depended on feudal homage which likewise involved Christian ceremonies. Existence would have been impossible for Jews in any Western country but for the attitude of the Church towards usury. Certain passages of Scripture (notably *St. Luke* vi, 35) were supposed to forbid the taking of interest on loans, and the Jews, therefore, had a monopoly of money-lending.

This made them very useful to governments, for they acted like sponges, soaking up wealth which could be squeezed out of them again into the Treasury. Kings, therefore, gave them a special protection, without which they would not have been able to collect their debts. They organised themselves into a sort of primitive banking association with agents in different parts of the country, and they were thus in a position to finance all sorts of costly enterprises which would have been impossible without their aid—Crusades, for instance, and cathedral building, and even wars. The customary rate of interest was a groat (4*d.*) in the pound per week, which works out at 83 per cent. per annum; and we read of a loan of £26 13*s.* 4*d.* to the Abbey of St. Edmunds which grew by compound interest to £880. Debtors often deliberately left loans unpaid in the hope that the Jew to whom they owed it would die, and they not infrequently succumbed to the temptation to hasten that event. There were several wholesale massacres of Jews of which this was the immediate object.

But King Edward was too conscientious to go on drawing revenue from what he believed to be a sin; and he resented the fact that many of the great nobles had pledged their estates so deeply as security for loans that they could hardly pay him their feudal dues. Quite early in his reign he made a law forbidding Jews to hold landed property and compelling them to wear a distinctive dress. Then, a little later, he prohibited usury altogether, and so reduced them to beggary and crime; and it was perhaps an act of mercy when in 1290 he carried his anti-Semitism to its logical conclusion by ordering them to leave the country altogether. The act was immensely popular, and it was felt to be a singular proof of unselfishness and piety. Jews

## 192 EDWARD THE FIRST AS LEGISLATOR

were not allowed to live in England again until the time of Oliver Cromwell.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *Show how Edward I rounded off the work begun by Henry II.*

(2) *With what justification is Edward I sometimes called "The English Justinian" ?*

## CHAPTER XIX

### Edward the First as King of Great Britain

(1276-1307)

*In no respect did Edward I show his statesmanship more clearly than in his determination to abandon all attempt to regain the lost Angevin Empire and to turn his attention to the more practicable task of uniting the British island under his rule. He succeeded as regards Wales, and at one time he also seemed to have done so as regards Scotland; but before the end of his reign it had become evident that the time was not yet ripe for a permanent Anglo-Scottish connection.*

#### 91. *The Conquest of Wales*

Up to the accession of Edward I the kings of England had made no serious attempt to bring Wales under their rule. The Welsh people—descendants of the Celts who had been driven westwards by the Anglo-Saxons—were a primitive mountain race dwelling in mere clay-and-wattle huts and living on herds of semi-wild cattle; and this mode of life made them very difficult to conquer. The Norman kings had therefore contented themselves by giving the border districts to “marcher-lords” with special powers to enable them to keep the Welsh out of England. South Wales was gradually overrun by adventurous barons like the Clares (§ 61) and Marshalls (§ 76), and no part of Britain contains the ruins of more Norman castles; but all the rest of the country continued to be a mere chaos of warring tribes until Llewelyn the Great made himself master of it in 1216. It was under his rule that the Welsh national spirit first showed itself, in the form of a revival of ancient Celtic poetry and

music. His grandson, Llewelyn ap Gruffyd, reconquered much of the border country, and de Montfort made a treaty with him by which these acquisitions were confirmed in consideration of homage and tribute to the King of England.

But at the death of Henry III the whole situation was changed. Llewelyn had never been on good terms with Edward, and he now neglected either to do the homage or to pay the tribute. Edward was glad of an excuse to carry out his long-cherished project of conquering Wales. As soon as his coronation and first Parliament were over he at once organised a vigorous campaign against Llewelyn. He showed great resource in grappling with the special difficulties of mountain warfare, and he had the advantage of local help both from the marcher-lords and from Llewelyn's own brother, David. A simultaneous attack from the east, the south, and the sea soon rounded the Welsh Prince up in Snowdonia, and he was compelled to make the *Treaty of Aberconway* (1277), by which he became a feudal vassal of Edward's, with territory limited to the modern Carnarvonshire; while David was rewarded with a similar fief corresponding to Denbighshire.

Edward now set up the English system of government in the rest of the conquered country, but in doing so he showed a careless indifference to Welsh national feeling, and his officers often acted harshly towards the natives. In 1282 a revolt suddenly broke out. Llewelyn could not resist the temptation to join the rebellion, and this time David did so too. Edward had to undertake another campaign, and once more he made his preparations so thoroughly that all opposition melted away before him. David was captured and executed as a traitor, while Llewelyn himself was killed in battle. Neither of the brothers left an heir, and the national resistance collapsed for lack of leadership. When a son was born to Edward at Carnarvon in 1284 he presented him to the people as "a prince who could not speak a word of English," and a few years later he followed up this piece of royal facetiousness by creating the child Prince of Wales, which title has ever since been borne by the eldest sons of kings of England.

He had now a second opportunity of settling the government of Wales, and he showed a characteristic capacity to profit by

experience. He left undisturbed most of the Welsh laws and customs, but removed all opportunity for any revival of separate government. He built a number of great castles—at Conway, Carnarvon, Beaumaris, Criccieth, and Harlech—which he garrisoned with Englishmen, and he introduced the English county system with sheriffs and shire-courts. From that day to this the Welsh people have maintained their own traditions, language, and art, without ever attempting to win political independence.

### 92. *The Scottish Arbitration*

A few years after the conquest of Wales a fortunate chance enabled Edward to advance his scheme for a united Britain an important stage further.

Ever since the time of Edward the Elder (§ 28) there had been a vague understanding that the kings of England had some sort of supremacy over Scotland, and William the Lion had actually done homage to Henry II at the time of the Treaty of Falaise (§ 62); but Scottish independence had been bought back from Richard I, since when the question of the relationship between the two countries had never been raised.

The population of Scotland was scanty in numbers and diverse in race. Gaels in the Highlands, Teutons in the Lowlands, Scandinavians on the remoter coasts, and a ruling class of Anglo-Norman nobles: these were materials out of which a nation could not readily be welded. But the country had recently enjoyed a century of settled government under capable kings, and the different races had at any rate learnt to live side by side in peace. Then, in 1286 a disaster befell the Scottish monarchy. The King, Alexander III, was accidentally killed, leaving as sole descendant a granddaughter born in Norway. The little princess was only three years old, but her claim was recognised by the Scottish nobles, and there was some talk of marrying her to the Prince of Wales, and so uniting the two countries by a personal tie. Unfortunately, the Maid of Norway, as she was called, died as the result of a rough passage across the North Sea; whereupon, half-a-dozen claimants to the vacant throne came forward. The most notable were John

Balliol and Robert Bruce, both of whom were Norman nobles descended from the daughters of William the Lion, with estates in England for which they owed allegiance to Edward I. For a few weeks a war of succession seemed inevitable, but eventually both parties agreed to refer the matter to the King of England, who had by this time gained a European reputation for wisdom and justice. Edward gladly agreed to act as arbitrator, for the position would enable him to re-assert old claims to suzerainty. Attended by his Court and an array of clerks learned in the law, he met the claimants and the other Scottish magnates at Norham Castle in May 1291. The Scots were somewhat taken aback when he opened the proceedings by demanding that they should all do him homage as overlord, but after some hesitation they complied. Then the legal arguments were heard; the experts were unanimous in favour of the claims of Balliol, and the King gave judgment accordingly. Balliol was duly crowned, and again did homage to Edward.

This incident was the high-water mark of Edward's prosperity. He had won the hearts of the English people, had conquered Wales, had reformed the laws, had gained unquestioned mastery over Church and State, had expelled the Jews, and had now united the whole island under his own supremacy. But at this point the tide of success began to turn.

### 93. *The Franco-Scottish Alliance*

The trouble began with a war with France. Edward had hitherto contrived to keep on good terms with French kings, even at the price of tacitly abandoning the old Angevin claims; but circumstances were now too strong for him.

As there were no navies to police the seas in those days, merchant vessels had to provide for their own safety; and commercial jealousies sometimes led to unofficial warfare. In 1293 a long series of sea-fights between Normans and Gascons culminated in a battle on a large scale, in which the Normans were defeated. King Philip V of France called upon Edward, as ruler of Gascony, to compensate the Normans for their losses, and summoned him to Paris to answer before the Great Council of France for the misdeeds of his Gascon subjects. Of course, the

King of England declined to place himself in such a humiliating position, whereupon Philip declared that he had forfeited Gascony altogether.

Edward was still determined to keep the peace, and sent his brother, Edmund "Crookback," to negotiate a settlement. Unfortunately, the Prince was completely outwitted. He discussed matters with the Queen of France (who was his daughter), and agreed to surrender six Gascon castles to Philip as reparation for the damage done in the sea-battle; but no sooner had French garrisons taken possession of the castles than Philip denied that he had ever consented to the arrangement, and insisted on the forfeiture of the whole province. This action, of course, made war inevitable, and Edward set to work to form an alliance among the vassals of the French monarchy who were jealous of its rising power. He also made a special demand for financial support from Parliament, emphasising, with every justification, that the quarrel was not of his seeking.

But his departure for the Continent was delayed again and again by troubles nearer home. The first was a revolt in Wales. He determined to deal with this himself, and sent his brother over to take his place in command of his forces in Aquitaine. By the autumn of 1295 he had quelled the Welsh, and was once more on the point of sailing for France, when a rebellion broke out in Scotland. Many of the Scottish nobles had resented their new King's homage to England, and Edward had done nothing to soothe their ruffled feelings. Determined that his supremacy should never again be in doubt, he had emphasised it by having appeals from Scottish law-courts brought before him, by making the Scottish King attend the English Great Council from time to time, and by requiring feudal service from the Scottish barons against France. King John Balliol was carried away by his subjects' resentment at these proceedings, and made a treaty with the King of France by which each was to help the other if attacked by Edward. That treaty was the beginning of an anti-English connection between France and Scotland that lasted off and on for three centuries.

These were the circumstances that made Edward summon his "Model Parliament" (§ 89) and lay before it his urgent need for money. As soon as he had gained the necessary subsidies



he made short work of the Scottish rebellion. In the spring of 1296 he crossed the border in strength, defeated the Scots near Dunbar, and deposed John Balliol, who fled into exile. By feudal law Scotland had "escheated" to him as overlord by the treason of its vassal-king, and he determined to keep the country henceforth under his immediate rule. He made arrangements for it to be governed during his absence by his own officials, and then returned to England, bringing with him the famous stone upon which the Kings of Scotland had hitherto been crowned at Scone. This was set up as part of the coronation chair at Westminster Abbey, where it remains to this day.

#### 94. *Confirmatio Cartarum*

At last the road seemed clear for the King to cross over to France. His presence was urgently needed there, for his brother had had all the worst of the struggle in Aquitaine; but now new difficulties arose—this time in England. All the money and supplies collected for the French war had been expended on the expeditions to Wales and Scotland, so he summoned another Parliament to meet him at Bury St. Edmunds (November, 1296). There the barons, knights, and burgesses agreed to make a suitable offering, but the clergy demurred. The Pope had recently issued a Bull, called from its first words *Clericis laicos*, which forbade Churchmen to pay any taxes whatever to lay powers, and the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that, while he recognised that the war with France was a just war, he felt bound to obey the commands of the Head of the Church. The best that he could suggest was that he should seek special permission to pay a subsidy. This meant a delay of months, and Edward was extremely angry. He put the clergy outside the protection of the law and threatened to confiscate all their property unless they complied with his demands by the following Easter.

Even this was not the end of his troubles. He called the chief nobles together at Salisbury (February, 1297) to explain his proposed plan of campaign in France. He himself was going to Flanders to invigorate his allies in those parts, while the leading barons were to go to Gascony and attack the French

King from that side. But to his amazed disgust the most important of them refused to fall in with this scheme. They had long chafed at the firm control he kept over them, and they now retaliated by insisting on the letter of feudal law according to which they were not compelled to serve except under himself in person. "By God, thou shalt go or hang!" stormed Edward. "By that same oath, my lord King, I will neither go nor hang!" replied the Earl of Norfolk. The assembly broke up in disorder, the malcontents gathered their men-at-arms, and the country seemed to be on the verge of another Barons' War.

Exasperated at this resistance to his will, Edward made wholesale requisitions of goods and exacted heavy dues on merchandise, which merely added to his troubles by throwing public opinion on the side of the opposition. Yet, in spite of everything, he determined to postpone his departure no longer. He came to terms with the clergy by cancelling the ban upon them; and the Pope soon afterwards withdrew his Bull. Then, despite the fact that yet another revolt had broken out in Scotland, and that the barons still refused to go to Gascony, he set sail for Flanders, leaving his young son Edward as regent. Naturally, matters went from bad to worse in his absence. The nobles protested against his unauthorised exactions and demanded that the Great Charter should be confirmed. A disaster in Scotland, where the royal forces were defeated at *Stirling Bridge* (September, 1297), made it impossible for the regency government to resist the opposition: at all costs the country had to be united against the danger of a Scottish invasion. Another Parliament was therefore called, and the Prince Regent consented in his father's name to the famous *Confirmation of the Charters*. This was a re-issue of the Great Charter of King John, with some clauses added which declared it illegal for the King to collect special aids or to confiscate property without the consent of Parliament, though his right to all "ancient customs" (§ 89) was expressly recognised.\*

\* The original form of these new clauses was the so-called *Statutum de Tallagio non Concedendo*, which denied the King's right to any taxation whatever without parliamentary consent. Centuries later, during the constitutional struggle under Charles I, the parliamentary leaders claimed that this was a part of English law; but from evidence that has since come to light it is clear that it was a mere draft, brought forward by the barons, but afterwards dropped in favour of the milder restrictions above-mentioned.

The barons who forced through the *Confirmatio Cartarum* were far from being profound statesmen, but they unconsciously made a notable step towards the constitutional monarchy of modern England; for they compelled the King to admit the right of Parliament to be consulted upon important matters of policy, and its power to refuse special taxation until grievances had been redressed.

### 95. *The End of the Reign*

Meanwhile, the French war was hanging fire. The repeated delays had robbed Edward of his chance to win a decisive victory; and after some months of futile campaigning he opened negotiations for peace and came home to deal with the Scottish revolt.

That movement had a power behind it which he never understood. He had supposed that the feudal homage of the Scottish nobles made him master of the country, but the misgovernment of his ministers had brought into existence a new force—Scottish patriotism. The peasants burghers and lairds (or lesser nobles) had found a bold and able leader in *Sir William Wallace*. His brilliant little victory at Stirling Bridge made him master of all southern Scotland, and he now began to harry the border-country. King Edward completely defeated him at *Falkirk*, largely through the skill of a body of Welsh archers who had already made a name for themselves during the campaign in Flanders. But in its new mood Scotland was not to be subdued by any single battle, and Edward was unable to follow up his victory effectively. Wherever he and his army went opposition died down, but as soon as he moved on it flamed up again behind his back. At last he had to return from Scotland, as from France, with his object unaccomplished.

For the next year or two his attention was taken up by negotiations with France and disaffection in England; but as soon as these matters were settled he led a fresh army into Scotland, prepared this time to overrun the country systematically by the method which had been so successful in Wales. The Scottish nobles, afraid for their English estates and jealous of the leadership of a mere knight like Wallace, flocked in to make

their submission to him, and were summoned to a meeting with the King's ministers to arrange a permanent system of government for the country. Not long afterwards Wallace was betrayed into his hands and sent to London to be executed as a traitor.

A chronicler calls Edward *Malleus Scotorum*, "the hammer of the Scots," and it seemed as if he had at last attained the aim he had kept before his eyes all through his reign—the union of the whole island under his rule. But it was not to be. The Scottish patriots soon found a new leader in *Robert Bruce*, the grandson of the late claimant to the throne. He had hitherto played much the same selfish part as the other Anglo-Scottish nobles, but his murder of an enemy, known as the Red Cornyn, in a church, made him an outlaw in the eyes of his own class, and he now placed himself at the head of the national cause in the hope of winning the crown. He managed to get himself crowned at Scone, but was soon a hunted fugitive in the Western Isles. In the days of adversity which followed (during which the famous spider-watching incident took place) he showed himself a born leader of men, daring, resourceful, vigorous, and inspiring. When he landed in Ayrshire with a handful of men, in 1307, the smouldering embers of revolt blazed up once more.

King Edward, enraged at being yet again forced to gather an army and march northwards, swore in his wrath that this time he would deal with those troublesome Scotsmen in such a fashion as to prevent them from troubling his peace any further. But fate ruled otherwise. He was now nearly seventy years old. His wonderful health and strength were at last breaking down, and he died at Burgh-on-Sands, near Carlisle. The hammer of the Scots had broken on the anvil.

### QUESTIONS

- (1) *Why did Edward I succeed in Wales and fail in Scotland?*
- (2) *What are the claims of Edward I to be considered the greatest of our medieval kings?*

## CHAPTER XX

### A Baronial Oligarchy

(1307-1327)

*The strong rule of Edward I was followed by a period of deplorable governmental weakness under his son. In the Middle Ages the only form of rule that could make a country happy and prosperous was a vigorous monarchy; but the vicious and unstable character of Edward II threw political power into the hands of cliques of nobles far more selfish and incapable than those who had fifty years before followed the lead of Simon de Montfort.*

#### 96. *The Lords Ordainers*

In outward appearance *Edward II* was as fine a man as *Edward I*, but there the resemblance ended. The son had none of the father's strength of purpose, and was utterly lacking in balance and sense of responsibility. He had no taste for the manly pastimes of the age—the tournament and the chase—which involved personal risk and exertion, and took his pleasure in gambling, luxurious living, and buffoonery in the company of unworthy companions, of whom the chief was a frivolous young Gascon named *Piers Gaveston*. *Edward I* was an affectionate father, and these weaknesses had caused him much sorrow and anxiety. He had tried to interest his heir in the business of kingship, and had sent Gaveston back to Gascony, but all in vain. The accession of such a king at such a crisis forebode evil to the realm; and it was not long in coming.

At the moment of his accession the younger *Edward* was

with his father on the way to a re-conquest of Scotland ; but he at once showed that he had no intention of following Edward I's policy in this or any other direction. He turned back to London, leaving Bruce master of the situation across the border ; he replaced all his father's experienced ministers with unworthy friends of his own ; and, of course, he lost no time in recalling Gaveston. That young man seems to have had some good qualities—courage and generosity, for instance ; but he was the wrong sort of friend for Edward, for he was a conceited, extravagant braggart, entirely lacking in "ballast." Before long he was the best hated man in England. No favour could be gained from the King save through him, and he made the most of his opportunities to treat better men than himself with insolence. He repaid this dislike with sarcastic ridicule which amused the King highly but exasperated the victims of it beyond endurance. It had taken the vigorous Edward I all his time to hold the high-spirited nobility in check, and the task was quite beyond his son. The five leading earls formed an association pledged to expel the favourite from the country, and at the first Parliament of the reign they expressed their minds in no uncertain language. Edward had not the strength of character either to resist opposition or to keep his word ; he sent his beloved Piers away, but recalled him as soon as he thought the storm had blown over. But Gaveston showed that he had neither learnt good manners nor forgotten old animosities, and the magnates came to the Parliament of 1310 in a ferocious mood. They now insisted on guaranteeing the permanent dismissal of the favourite by taking the direction of the government out of the King's hands altogether. "The perils to which the country is exposed by bad counsellors," they declared in their petition, "are only to be avoided and redressed by ordinance of your baronage." The abject Edward once more gave way without a struggle. He hoped that by surrendering the powers of the monarchy into the hands of these factious nobles he would perhaps be allowed to enjoy the society of his friend—a typical example of his frivolity and irresponsibility. He empowered the nobles to choose certain of their number to draw up "ordinances for the better government of the realm," and the committee so chosen came to be known as *The Lords*

*Ordainers*. Thus for the third time within a century the government of England had fallen into the hands of a baronial oligarchy.

The Ordinances, issued after more than a year of discussions and adjournments, laid down that : (a) The King was to live of his own—that is, on his feudal income and the produce of the royal estates, without having recourse to special taxation ; (b) he was to do nothing of importance without the consent of the nobles ; (c) Gaveston was to be exiled without hope of return from every part of the King's dominions. Edward struggled hard against the last decree, but the Ordainers were adamant, and " brother Peter " had to betake himself to Flanders. But he had not been there many months when the King, finding life unbearable without his friend, screwed up his courage to recall him once more. The Ordainers treated this as an act of war and assembled an armed force, before which Gaveston had to take refuge in Scarborough Castle. A siege was undertaken by the Earl of Pembroke, and the favourite surrendered on a promise of safety to life and limb. Pembroke brought his prisoner down to Wallingford, where he handed him over to the Earl of Warwick. This sealed Gaveston's fate, for Warwick was the bitterest of all his enemies and did not feel himself bound by the terms of the surrender at Scarborough. A few days later the wretched man was brutally murdered by hired assassins. For a time the King was stirred to some show of spirited resentment, but before the year was out he gave way and was publicly reconciled to the murderers of his friend.

### 97. *The Suppression of the Templars*

Just at this time an important change was taking place in the position of the Papacy. The Popes did not long enjoy their triumph over the Empire, for their hold over the minds of men began to relax from that very moment. To some extent this decline was a consequence of their own increasing worldliness ; but it was mainly due to the gathering of a new force which was destined to undermine the whole fabric of European unity : the spirit of *nationality*. National monarchies were now beginning to supersede the authority both of the Church and of

feudal overlords. We have seen how the English nation was gradually being welded together under the Plantagenet kings, and the same thing was happening in France. The royal power which had been built up there during the previous century (§ 69) made King Philip IV the most powerful potentate in Europe. When he quarrelled with the Papacy he proved a more formidable enemy than the Emperors had ever been, for the latter had rarely been masters of their own vassals in the way that Philip was. In 1305 he procured the election of a French Pope, who lived at Avignon instead of at Rome, and for the next seventy years successive Popes were more or less in the power of successive Kings of France. *The Babylonish Captivity*, as it was afterwards called, robbed the Papacy of its claim to be independent of and superior to the princes of this world; and the medieval conception of the unity of Christendom began to fade away.

One of the first results of the "Captivity" was the suppression of the Order of Knights Templar. Now that the crusading movement had died out the Templars had no longer any *raison d'être*, but they still owned enormous wealth. Philip IV cast covetous eyes on the possessions of the French branches of the Order. He therefore induced the Pope to institute an inquiry into its conduct. It is likely that some of the charges brought against the Templars were founded on fact, for Satan generally finds mischief for idle hands to do; but there is no doubt that they were grossly exaggerated. Confessions were extracted by torture, and fifty of the Knights were burned alive in Paris. The Order having been abolished by papal decree, its property was nominally handed over to the Knights Hospitallers; but much of it found its way to its appointed destination in King Philip's coffers.

Edward II, who had married the French King's daughter Isabella, soon found an excuse for following his father-in-law's example. In England the Templars had given little cause of offence, and no personal severities accompanied the confiscation of their property. It is interesting to note that their former headquarters was leased to the London lawyers—whence the names "Inner Temple" and "Middle Temple" still used for the buildings occupied by barristers' chambers. But most of the



wealth of the English Templars was squandered in riotous living by the King.

### 98. *Bannockburn*

For the first seven years of his reign Edward II was too much occupied with home affairs to have a thought to spare for the re-conquest of Scotland ; but Robert Bruce had not been able to take advantage of this respite to make himself master of his kingdom. He got little or no support from the jealous Scottish nobles ; he found it difficult with his limited resources to capture the fortresses which Edward I had garrisoned with English soldiers ; and the Pope had excommunicated him for his murder of Comyn (§ 95).

Still, his progress was steady if slow ; and in 1314 he determined on a great effort to take Stirling Castle, the key position of the English army of occupation. Even the sluggish spirit of Edward was stirred to make some effort to avert the danger ; but the Ordainers cared for nothing but the interests of their own class and refused to give him any support. So he and his friends went off without them. They raised a considerable force from the northern counties ; but the King's total lack of military capacity was speedily made manifest. He could not exist without his accustomed luxuries, and his line of march was encumbered with a baggage-train fifty miles long. Nor did he show any grasp of the realities of campaigning. After delaying at Berwick until it was almost too late to save Stirling, he rushed thither by such severe marches that his men and horses were worn out ; and he then offered battle without giving them time for recuperation.

Bruce drew up his force—footmen, for the most part, armed with pike and axe—by the side of a little stream called the *Bannock*, a few miles from Stirling. The English army consisted chiefly of knights and archers, but the King had none of his father's skill in combining these two arms effectively. He failed to protect his bowmen from a flank charge by the Scottish horse, which destroyed them as a fighting force. Then, when the English knights were stumbling into concealed pits which the Scots had dug between the lines, Bruce completed

their confusion by launching a general attack. Edward lost no time in deciding that all was lost and that the one thing that mattered was his own safety. He galloped off to Dunbar and took ship for England. There was no one of authority to rally the bewildered English rank-and-file. Within an hour of the first onset the invading army had ceased to exist, and King Robert the Bruce was King of Scotland in fact as well as in name.

### 99. *The End of the Oligarchy*

Meanwhile, the Ordainers were proving quite as unfit to govern as the King whose power they had usurped. The leading spirit among them was Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, who was the son of Edmund "Crookback" (§ 93) and therefore the King's cousin. In ability and character he was quite second-rate; he owed his predominance to his great wealth as the possessor of five earldoms. In the first few years of the reign, when the nobles were merely opposing Gaveston, he gained a reputation for public spirit which he never afterwards lost; but opposition is much easier than constructive statesmanship, and when he and the other chief nobles had taken over the government, they devoted most of their energies to quarrelling among themselves.

At length the King managed to form a party of personal supporters to rescue him from his humiliating position. The leaders in this were the *Despensers*, father and son, and it was not long before the latter had taken the place formerly held by Gaveston, both in the affections of the King and in the hatred of the barons. Up to a point, too, events ran much the same course. Lancaster headed a little clique among the Ordainers pledged to overthrow the Despensers; the King was intimidated into exiling his favourite, but recalled him as soon as he dared; whereupon the barons renewed their league in bloodthirsty mood. But there was by this time so much ill-feeling among the Ordainers that they failed to concentrate their forces effectively, and the King was able to catch them unprepared. Lancaster was defeated and captured at *Boroughbridge* in Yorkshire, and was executed a week later at Pontefract. We can judge

of the disgust felt by the people of England for the King's character when we find that Lancaster was regarded as a martyr to the cause of good government. He succeeded to the position in popular esteem that had formerly belonged to Simon de Montfort—but with far less justification. De Montfort had been a brilliant soldier and a far-sighted statesman, but Lancaster was neither. His opposition to a bad king was his only virtue, and that was inspired mainly by greed for power and wealth.

The King now summoned a Parliament to York which abolished the Ordainers and cancelled the Ordinances. There is one significant point about the Act which did this. It declared that the Ordinances were illegal, inasmuch as they were the work of a mere council of barons and not of a full Parliament. That Edward II of all kings should put forward such an argument is striking evidence that the right of the Commons to take part in all important legislation was already becoming firmly established.

### 100. *Downfall*

After the fall of the Ordainers the King ruled undisturbed for some five years. When opposition arose again it centred round the Queen. Edward had never been on good terms with her, and she had latterly become very jealous of the Despensers. An energetic and ambitious woman, she strongly resented being pushed into the background by them ; but, finding her protests unheeded, she dissembled her anger and waited for an opportunity of revenge.

It came through a foreign complication. The Kings of France could not rest until they had absorbed Gascony, the last of the Plantagenet provinces. There had been constant disputes as to the homage due for it, and in 1324 Charles IV found a pretext for invading it. By an error of judgment extraordinary even for him, Edward sent his Queen to France to negotiate on his behalf. There she met one Roger Mortimer, an English noble whom Edward had driven into exile for opposition to the Despensers. She fell in love with him, and joined with him in a plot for the overthrow of their enemies at the English court.

She had her eldest son, Edward, with her, and gained Flemish support for her project by betrothing him to Philippa of Hainault. Having gathered a band of foreign adventurers and English exiles, she and her lover landed in Suffolk in September, 1326. Edward now reaped the harvest of his misdeeds. Not a hand was raised to defend him; on the contrary, people of all classes flocked to the Queen's standard. It soon became evident that the insurgents would not be content with the mere dismissal of the Despensers—they were intent on getting rid of the King himself. The wretched Edward could make hardly a show of resistance. He was driven into South Wales and there taken prisoner (Nov. 1327).

A Parliament now met in London and decided to replace him on the throne by his son. The chief officers of State went down to the Welsh castle where he was imprisoned and formally renounced their allegiance. Even now his enemies were not satisfied. They subjected him to every kind of ill-treatment in the hope that he would die; and when their hope proved vain, they had him murdered in his bed (September, 1327).

For the next two years Isabella and Mortimer carried on the government in the name of the young *Edward III.* Their main achievement was the *Treaty of Northampton* (1329) with the Scots, by which all claim to feudal superiority over Scotland was renounced for ever, and a marriage was arranged between the Scottish King's son David and an English princess. The "Shameful peace," as it was called, was very unpopular; but the English government was in no position to carry on a war, and anything was better than a continuance of the raids which, year after year, were desolating the northern counties of England.

Still, the Isabella-Mortimer régime was too rotten to last. All decent people were shocked to see the country ruled by a murderer-Queen and her paramour; and Mortimer's arrogance aroused frantic jealousy and hatred. Some of the nobles gained the ear of the young King and urged him to throw off his degrading dependence. In 1330, when the Parliament was assembled at Nottingham, Edward suddenly struck. He had Mortimer arrested, and issued a proclamation that he was henceforward going to take the government into his own hands.

Mortimer was duly executed ; but the Queen escaped with less than her deserts, for she was allowed to retire to her estates on a pension.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *Compare the causes and effects of the three baronial oligarchies that seized power between 1214 and 1308.*

(2) *"The reign of Edward II was marked by a complete lack of statesmanship on the part of the King, his friends, and his foes." Examine this statement.*

### THE CLAIM OF EDWARD III TO THE FRENCH CROWN

PHILIP III  
(1270-1285)

PHILIP IV  
(1285-1314)

Charles of Valois

LOUIS X    PHILIP V    CHARLES IV  
(1314-1316) (1316-1322) (1322-1328)

Isabella	PHILIP VI
m. EDWARD II	(1328-1350)
EDWARD III	JOHN
	(1350-1364)
	CHARLES V
	(1364-1380)

## CHAPTER XXI

### Crécy and the Black Death

(1330-1360)

*The first half of the reign of Edward III was remarkable for two events which were amongst the ultimate causes of the decay of medieval civilisation. These were the beginning of the Hundred Years' War, which marked the triumph of the national state over the feudal state, and the Black Death, which disintegrated the economic structure of feudalism.*

#### 101. *The Outbreak of the Great War*

At the time when his *coup d'état* gave him control over the government, Edward III was barely eighteen years of age; but men matured early in those days, and the main lines of his character were already formed. Like his grandfather, he seemed born for kingship—at any rate in its outward aspects. He was tall, well built, and handsome, and cut a fine figure amid the pomps of royalty. Free-handed, good-humoured, and kindly, he was eager to be well thought of by all with whom he came into contact. He was an expert at all knightly exercises, full of the fashionable ideas of chivalry, and keenly ambitious of fame as a warrior.

The outstanding feature of the first ten years of his long reign was the gradual emergence of the causes which led to the Hundred Years' War with France. Ill-feeling had long smouldered between the two monarchies, owing partly to the question of homage due for Gascony, and partly to the help given by successive French kings to the Scots in their struggle

for independence. In 1328 the position was complicated by the death of Charles IV of France, leaving as next-of-kin his sister—the Queen-Mother of England (§ 97). Now, it was a generally-accepted principle of feudal law that, although a woman could not hold a fief in her own person, she could transmit her rights to her son—in this case, the young Edward III. But the French magnates who had to settle the question naturally felt that they must have as their king a man to whom French interests would come first, last, and all the time. They therefore chose Philip of Valois, cousin of the late King. Isabella made no attempt to enforce her claim, but it became an additional cause of irritation and suspicion.

Then followed trouble over Scotland. The Anglo-Scottish nobles who had supported Edward II against Bruce had been ignored by the Treaty of Northampton (§ 100). Edward III declined to re-open the question; but they themselves, headed by Edward Balliol (who claimed the Scottish crown), collected an independent force, landed in Fife, and defeated an unwieldy array collected on behalf of the boy-king, David Bruce, at Dupplin Moor. This victory made Balliol King of Scotland, but only for a few weeks. Hardly had his supporters dispersed to their re-won estates when he was ambushed by the Nationalists and driven to seek refuge in England again. He had done homage to Edward for his kingdom, and the English King now felt that he must support his vassal. Marching north with a well-found army, he overwhelmed the Scots at *Halidon Hill* (1333). Balliol was once more placed on the throne; but patriotic Scots would never accept a king foisted on them by an outsider. With the underhand support of the French King they made Balliol's position impossible; and by 1339 he was once more a fugitive in England.

Meanwhile, the suppressed ill-will between England and France had gone on fermenting. The Pope tried to mediate, but only made matters worse by his obvious bias in favour of his patron. Philip gave a home to the little King David of Scotland after Halidon Hill, and Edward retaliated by harbouring an enemy of Philip's. Norman sailors gained the upper hand in the narrow seas and used their advantage to prey upon English shipping and even to raid English ports. Then came a fresh

cause of quarrel. The Count of Flanders, at the instigation of his feudal overlord, the King of France, arrested some English merchants in Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres; whereupon Edward stopped the export of wool thither. This injured English wool-growers, but it meant absolute ruin for Flemish weavers. The burghers of the three cities revolted against the Count who had brought the trouble upon them and set up a commercial republic under the patronage of King Edward. This support of a rebellion in a French fief gave Philip an excuse to declare that Edward had forfeited Gascony altogether—and the war began.

### 102. *A National State versus a Feudal State*

In the first phase of the war, lasting from 1338 till 1340, Edward relied mainly on Continental alliances—first with some of the princes of the Empire, then with the cities of Flanders. The campaigns were carried on in strict accordance with the rules of chivalry, but with no definite result except the ruin of thousands of harmless French peasants whose lands were laid waste, and the piling up of immense war debts. Only two noteworthy incidents enlivened these years. (1) The Flemish burghers induced Edward to renew his claim to the throne of France, so that they could maintain that in supporting him they had not broken their feudal bond but had merely transferred it to their "rightful" overlord. (2) In 1340 Edward found his landing in Flanders opposed by a French fleet, and in the resultant *Battle of Sluys* the English navy gained "command of the sea" for the first time in history. So completely did it annihilate its enemy that for a quarter of a century its supremacy was undisputed, to the great advantage of English overseas trade. The land fighting continued to be ludicrously ineffective, however, and sheer financial exhaustion soon caused the two kings to agree to a truce. This was renewed from year to year until 1345, when Edward made preparations to renew the war on a much greater scale and on a wholly different plan.

From this point it began to be clear that the contest was between two different types of state. The French monarchy



had increased greatly in strength during the past two centuries—but merely by strengthening the feudal ties which bound to it the various provinces. The English monarchy, on the other hand, from William the Conqueror to Edward I, had built up a unified state in which no noble enjoyed any semblance of sovereign power. In England feudalism had long been falling into decay, and Edward III felt himself to be a national monarch rather than a feudal suzerain. One cause of this was the increasing power of Parliament, which compelled him to appeal to patriotic spirit in order to obtain the wherewithal to carry on the war; and Parliament itself was a powerful centripetal force, for the knights and burgesses of the Commons—men in the habit of working in local affairs with the classes above and below them—were constantly meeting the King and carrying the spirit of unity back with them into the remotest parts of the country.

Moreover, the military organisation of feudalism was fast being replaced by the idea of national service. This was mainly due to the fact that the Norman and Angevin kings had preserved the old Anglo-Saxon institution of the *fyrð*. The English yeoman was accustomed to the idea that it was his duty upon occasion to fight for the king, and he was by law compelled to provide himself with weapons for the purpose. Such a class was easily imbued with national pride, especially as this feeling was now combined with scope for adventure and gain. For the war was being fought in an enemy country, and a rich one. What yeoman or yeoman's son but would welcome the chance to leave the dull routine of life in his native manor for foreign service from which he might return in a few years with wondrous tales of all that he had heard and seen and done—and with perchance a couple of gold candlesticks, looted from some French monastery, the price of which would enable him to settle down in comfort on his own farm? The King of France could offer no such opportunities, and had no such class to offer them to. Among his subjects were plenty of proud magnates with military vassals of their own, and plenty of pursy burghers in the cities; but all the rest were wretched serfs, fit for nothing but the agricultural drudgery in which they spent their whole lives.

103. *Crécy and Calais*

When Edward III renewed the war in 1346, he entered into contracts with various knights and nobles to raise troops of volunteers to be paid out of the national exchequer, and the necessary supplies were voted by Parliament. Thus, it was a purely national army of archers and men-at-arms with which he landed in Normandy. He began by sacking several cities, including Caen ; and having sent his transports home laden with booty, he worked his way towards Paris. But before long his position began to become critical. The inevitable wastage of war was reducing his numbers from day to day, while Philip was collecting an immense feudal array with which to crush him. He therefore began to retire towards the coast, with the French close at his heels. It was evident that a decisive engagement was at hand, for the English were driven into a corner, while the French were inspired with confidence by their overwhelming superiority in numbers.

When Edward drew up his men for the battle, on the outskirts of the forest of *Crécy*, he relied for success mainly upon his archers. The longbow had become the traditional weapon of Englishmen of the yeoman class, and constant practice had given them a strength of limb and a precision of aim which enabled them to penetrate the thickest mail at a hundred paces distance. The superiority of archery over the time-honoured charge of knights in armour had been shown at Bannockburn, and again at Halidon Hill ; it was now to be tested in an engagement of first-class importance.

The French attack began with the sending forward of some hired cross-bowmen from Genoa, while the knights were arranging themselves for the great charge which was to sweep the English army out of existence. But the Genoese found themselves completely outranged by the English archers, and were unable to get near enough to them to reply effectively. Thereupon the gallant knights behind them lost patience and galloped through their own auxiliaries, trampling them underfoot as they went. But they did not get very far. A withering hail of arrows—aimed for the most part at their horses—threw their

line into desperate confusion. Fifteen times, we are told, did the Frenchmen rally their forces and renew the charge, but always with the same result. Only on the right wing did they succeed in getting to grips with their foe. There the sixteen-year-old Prince of Wales was in command. There is a story that the King, watching the battle from a windmill on a hill in the rear, refused to send support thither from the reserve, so that his son might have a chance to show his worth as a warrior in his first engagement.\* Anyway, the attack was eventually repulsed, and at nightfall King Philip drew off the shattered remnant of his host.

The English army was in no condition to follow up its victory by a renewed attack on Paris. Edward continued his march towards the coast and laid siege to Calais. The place was defended by enormously strong walls, and could be reduced only by means of a blockade. This was a very arduous and unpleasant undertaking, especially in winter, but the King faced it with vigorous determination. He built wooden huts and settled down to conduct the government of England from his headquarters in the lines. The inhabitants held out until the summer of the following year, hoping that their king would then come to their relief. Philip appeared, but when he saw Edward's preparations to receive him he decided not to risk another Crécy, and retired without striking a blow. Thereupon the town surrendered. Edward treated the defenders well according to the standards of the age; but he expelled most of them from their homes and replaced them by English people. He intended Calais to be not merely an English "bridge-head" for future attacks on France, but the Continental centre of the wool-trade. Such it remained for the next two hundred years.

These victories in France were confirmed by an equally decisive defeat of the Scots. The Franco-Scottish connection had already become an established tradition, and young King David had been urged by Philip to create a diversion by invading England. He did so, expecting to meet with little resistance. He was quickly undeceived. He managed to get as far as

\* Amongst the slain was the blind old King of Bohemia; his crest (three ostrich feathers) and motto (*Ich dien*) were adopted by the victorious Prince, and have been used by all subsequent Princes of Wales.

*Neville's Cross*, on the River Wear, but was there defeated and taken prisoner by a local force hastily assembled by the northern barons under the leadership of the Archbishop of York.

#### 104. *The Black Death*

With France demoralised by Crécy, with a secure port of disembarkation at Calais, and with the northern frontier secured by *Neville's Cross*, glorious times seemed to be at hand; but as a matter of fact there was no more serious fighting for eight years. This was due partly to the serious financial strain which the new method of raising armies imposed upon the government, but even more to the dislocation of the national life by the Black Death (1348-1349).

This was a form of the Bubonic Plague still common in parts of Asia. It had never before been known in Europe, and its effects far exceeded those of any epidemic before or since. It appears to have been brought to Italian seaports from the Levant, and to have spread thence, in the course of a few months, to France and Spain. It reached England and Germany in the summer of 1348, Scotland and the Baltic in the following year. In some places whole villages were wiped out; it attacked the young and vigorous more virulently than the old and weak; such havoc did it play that cattle wandered about unattended, crops rotted in the fields, the dead were left unburied, and the Pope had to authorise laymen to administer the sacraments to each other. No doubt its ravages were increased by the medieval ignorance of medicine and lack of sanitation. Probably one-third of the population perished in the course of six months, and it was not until the end of Elizabeth's reign that the population of England was again what it had been at the accession of Edward III.

The catastrophe gave the medieval order of society a shock from which it never recovered. Many of its indirect effects upon men's ideas and habits did not show themselves at once. But one immediate result was an acute shortage of workers; and the freemen on the manors were able to demand as much as a shilling a day for their labour, instead of the customary two-pence. To the ruling classes this seemed almost as shocking as

the Plague itself, for such matters had never been regulated by competition, but by custom, and nobody had any idea of what we call to-day, "The Law of Supply and Demand." As soon as Parliament ventured to assemble again it made a valiant attempt to restore "the good old days" by passing *The Statute of Labourers* (1351), which made it a crime to demand or to pay more, either for labour or for goods, than had been paid before 1348. But this was like giving orders to wind and waves. It was impossible for the government, with no police system, to prevent landowners from paying extra wages to save their crops, and the statute merely caused ill-feeling and law-breaking.

This period was also marked by the passing of two famous anti-papal acts. Jealousy of the power of the Pope had often been felt before, but there was now a special reason for it, inasmuch as the Popes were living at Avignon under the influence of the national enemy. Several old-standing grievances now came to a head, therefore: (1) The Popes' practice of reserving the revenues of English benefices for their own personal friends and supporters (§ 77-8) was forbidden by *The Statute of Provisors* (1351). (2) *The Statute of Præmunire* (1353) made it illegal to bring law-cases before foreign courts, such as those at Avignon.

Of course, these statutes brought about no sudden change. It was easier to make such laws than to carry them into effect. The authority of the Pope was too deeply engrained in men's minds to be wiped out by an Act of Parliament. People continued to appeal to the judgment of Avignon, and the King himself sent thither for "provisions" to appoint his ministers to bishoprics over the heads of the Cathedral Chapters which had the right of election to them. But what the passing of these Acts really did prove was the growing concern for national independence—that the head of the Catholic Church was now felt to be a "foreigner."

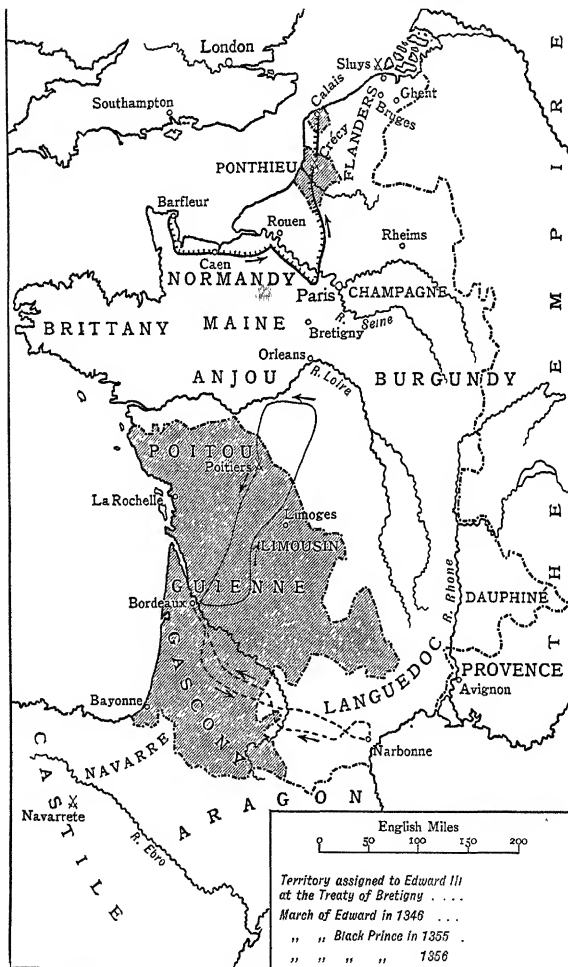
### 105. Poitiers and Brétigny

During these years of truce King Edward had by no means given up the idea of the French war. We see one proof of his chivalric enthusiasm in the beautiful St. George's Chapel at

Windsor (his birthplace and favourite residence), which he built about this time to be the headquarters of his famous Order of the Knights of the Garter. And fighting never really ceased in France. The French made several attempts to re-capture Calais, to which the English retaliated by conquering more of the country in the neighbourhood. Moreover, some of the regiments raised for the King's service in the Crécy campaign continued as "Free Companies" to carry on private warfare for their own profit.

Then official hostilities began again—once more as a result of a quarrel when the Pope was trying to turn the truce into a permanent peace. This time Edward planned a two-fold expedition. He himself was to attack Normandy while the Prince of Wales distracted the attention of King John of France (who had succeeded Philip VI a few years before) by a great plundering raid in the south. The King's attack came to nothing; but his son, now beginning to be known as *The Black Prince* from the colour of his armour, won the most dazzling of English victories. He was now twenty-five years old, at the zenith of his powers, and had already won a reputation as a warrior second to none in Christendom. In 1355 he led a small but efficient army from Bordeaux into the heart of southern France, devastating the countryside. In the following year he repeated the exploit in a northerly direction; but this time he was intercepted by King John, who had the whole feudal strength of France at his back. When the two armies came into contact near *Poitiers*, the Prince realised the extent of his peril—the odds against him were something like seven to one. He therefore consented to parley, and offered to surrender the whole of his booty; but the French King, exultant that at last he had his redoubtable foe at his mercy, demanded that the Prince and a hundred of his gentlemen should become prisoners of war. This was too much; the terms were rejected and the battle began. The result was an English triumph so overwhelming that the victors were dumbfounded at their own success. The countryside was cut up by roads and hedges which minimised the advantage of numbers; the French commanders failed to co-operate and threw each other into confusion; and surprise attacks on their flanks completed their

# FRANCE in the time of EDWARD III



discomfiture. Hundreds of knights, dozens of great nobles, and the King himself were taken prisoner. Froissart, the famous contemporary chronicler of the war, gives a glowing account of the courtesy of the Prince towards his distinguished captives; but they were transported to England to await the payment of their ransoms.

England and her King were raised to a pinnacle of military glory never dreamed of before; yet these achievements were followed by a miserable anti-climax. The question now arose of arranging the terms of a permanent peace. The captivity of King John caused the whole fabric of the government of France to collapse for a time. The peasantry, driven desperate by the depredations of the Free Companies and by the exactions of their own lords, rose in the terrible rebellion known as the *Jacquerie* (1358) from the name of its leader, one Jacques Bonhomme. The French nobles eventually managed to suppress it, and slaughtered the serfs with such frightful ferocity that whole districts were turned into deserts. Yet when King John agreed to cede all the former Angevin dominions to his captor, the magnates of France refused to ratify his surrender. In 1360, therefore, King Edward led another great raid from Normandy right across country, intending to be crowned King of France at Rheims, the traditional place for the coronation of French kings. He failed in this, for he found that his earlier devastations had made it impossible to feed his army on the country. At last, at the little village of *Brétigny*, a treaty was arranged by which John was to be released for a ransom of three million crowns, while Edward was to abandon his claim to the French throne in return for being recognised as independent sovereign of Aquitaine, Ponthieu, and Calais.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *Show how the spirit of nationality was strengthened during the reign of Edward III.*

(2) *Describe and account for the anti-papal legislation of Edward III.*



## CHAPTER XXII

### “ A Lame and Impotent Conclusion ”

(1360-1377)

*The first half of the reign of Edward III saw the climax of medieval England. After the Treaty of Brétigny it became increasingly evident that in conquering France the country had overtaxed its strength, and that the Black Death, coupled with the decline in the moral authority of the Papacy, was already undermining the whole fabric of medieval civilisation.*

#### 106. *The Conquests in France undone*

The terms of the *Treaty of Brétigny* were never really carried out. The French provinces assigned to Edward could not be induced to acknowledge his authority, while the English garrisons in Normandy and Maine formed themselves into Free Companies and continued to live on the country by pillage. The French raised similar bodies of irregular troops, their most famous leader being Bertrand du Guesclin, a Breton knight whose courage, prowess, and resource made him one of the foremost warrior-heroes of the Middle Ages. Thus, unofficial warfare continued to devastate the country even after peace had been proclaimed. King John had been released on the signing of the treaty, but when he found himself unable to keep up with the instalments of his ransom, he crossed to England and surrendered again. Edward treated him with a similar spirit of knight-errantry, but he remained in captivity until his death, a year or two later.

Then followed an exploit of the Black Prince's in Spain.

Pedro the Cruel, King of Castile, earned his nickname so thoroughly that his subjects rebelled in favour of his brother, Henry of Trastamara. The latter gained the support of France and du Guesclin enlisted a band of French and English soldiers of fortune to go to his support. Pedro fled to Bordeaux, where he persuaded the Black Prince to make a counter-invasion in his favour. Once more did the Prince show his supremacy in the arts of war: he utterly defeated du Guesclin at the *Battle of Navarrete* (1367). But he did himself more harm than good by the exploit. For one thing, he contracted a disease which brought him to his death six years later. For another, he exhausted in Spain the forces and revenues which he needed to keep possession of Aquitaine. Able as he was as a soldier, he was very unsuccessful as ruler of a conquered province. He and his friends gained a reputation for insular pride which has stuck to Englishmen right down to the present day. "I witnessed," wrote Froissart, "the haughtiness of the English; no gentleman of Aquitaine could obtain office or appointment in their own country, for the English said they were not worthy of them, which made the Gascons very indignant." The expenses of the Castilian campaign compelled the Prince to put on a "Hearth Tax," which caused a revolt; and the rebels appealed to the King of France, who declared that they were still his subjects, inasmuch as the terms of Brétigny had never been fulfilled. He summoned the Prince to Paris, whereupon the latter defied him, and the war began again (1369).

But circumstances had changed since the days of Crécy and Poitiers. Edward III was now sinking into premature old age, while the Black Prince had become an invalid, unable to mount his horse. Charles V of France, on the other hand, was a far more active king than his father, John, had been; patriotic feeling had been aroused among his subjects by the humiliating treaty, and in du Guesclin (who now became Constable of France) he had a general of brilliant ability. Spontaneous risings took place in all the conquered provinces. The officials of the English government could enforce submission only in their immediate neighbourhood—everywhere else the inhabitants welcomed the forces of the King of France, which now began to cross the frontiers. The Black Prince ordered the massacre of the citizens

of Limoges for this sort of conduct, and watched the slaughter from his litter. But nothing could stay the tide of French success. Du Guesclin avoided pitched battles, and let the English wear themselves out by marching about the country. A notable example of this was the expedition of John of Gaunt (the King's fourth son) with the finest English army that ever invaded France. He marched out of Calais, through Picardy into Burgundy, then right across central France, with du Guesclin hovering on his flanks and with forces wasting away from hunger, cold, and desertions, until at last a mere handful reached Bordeaux (1373). In the previous year England had lost the supremacy at sea which had meant so much to her commerce since the battle of Sluys (§ 102). A force had been sent to land at Rochelle under the Earl of Pembroke. The King of France asked his ally, Henry of Trastamara (who had now become King of Castile), for naval support, and the English expedition was utterly destroyed after a two-days' struggle against desperate odds.

In 1375 the English were compelled to agree to a truce. No definite re-settlement of boundaries was made; but for all practical purposes their possessions in France were henceforth limited to the country in the immediate neighbourhood of Calais, Bordeaux, and Bayonne.

### 107. *The Birth of the "Lancastrian Party"*

These disasters reacted upon home politics. Patriotic feeling was mortified, especially when taxation increased owing to the shrinkage of taxable area, while commerce declined owing to the loss of sea-power. The government was torn between rival factions, especially when John of Gaunt returned after the truce. This prince owed his name to the fact that he was born at Ghent at the time when his father was in alliance with the Flemings (§ 102). He was at this time a young man in the early thirties; able, ambitious, not over-scrupulous; the favourite son of the doting old King; the wealthiest man in the kingdom owing to his marriage with the heiress of the vast estates of the earldom of Lancaster—now elevated to a dukedom for his benefit. He quickly wrested from the Black Prince the

political influence which seemed to belong by right to the heir-apparent; but the fact that the latter was desperately ill—dying by inches, in fact—gave the younger brother a great advantage. Moreover, the King had by this time lost all self-respect, and was living in debased subjection to a frivolous and self-seeking woman named Alice Perrers, who was a tool of John of Gaunt. A regular “Lancastrian Party” began to grow up, which, having contrived to get a majority on the Council, used its power to amass wealth at the public expense. Yet the Duke always professed to be eager to reform abuses, particularly the excessive wealth of the Church; and this gained him a good deal of support among the nobles, who hoped to enrich themselves if the Church were disendowed.

This corrupt gang had a severe set-back in 1376, when the emptiness of the Treasury compelled the summoning of a Parliament. *The Good Parliament*, as it was afterwards called, made history by attacking the dominant party with the utmost boldness. The Commons brought before the Lords a formal charge of corruption against two of the Duke’s personal supporters on the Council, and the accused were condemned to the loss of rank and property. This was the origin of *impeachment*, a legal weapon often used in later centuries as a means of making the King’s ministers feel their responsibility to the nation. The Good Parliament then went on to banish Alice Perrers from the Court, and to appoint a new set of ministers—all men who were hostile to Lancaster.

While the Houses were still sitting the Black Prince died—surely one of the unhappiest deaths in all history. After enjoying in his youth all that glory, success, and power can give, he had lain for six years on a sick bed, watching the fruits of his victories being thrown away, seeing his father a puppet in the hands of evil-disposed people, his brother manifestly conspiring to oust him from his rightful position as Prince of Wales. And his last days were tormented by anxiety for his little son Richard, about to become heir-apparent.

His fears on this last point were not justified by the event, however. When in 1377 the old King sank into a dishonoured grave, the Black Prince’s party at once rallied round his ten-year-old son, and had him at once proclaimed *King Richard II.*



John of Gaunt made no attempt to resist this. He and his supporters had made themselves extremely unpopular with the country at large, and he knew that if he attempted to seize the regency he would be faced with a civil war in which he would certainly be worsted. He had been suspected of aiming at the crown himself, but he was too deeply imbued with the traditions of chivalry ever to have harboured such a design. After attending his little nephew's coronation he retired to his estates in the midlands.

### 108. *The Wool Trade*

In discussing the reign of Edward III we have so far been concerned mainly with war and politics ; but it was not in those spheres that its greatest importance in English history lay. Even more significant for the future of the nation were the changes that took place in the course of it in agriculture, industry, and commerce. These developments were due partly to the fostering care of the Government, but chiefly to the natural effects of the Black Death.

Wool had long been the country's most important export ; in fact, during the Middle Ages England supplied the looms of Flanders with raw material in much the same way as Australia supplies the looms of Yorkshire to-day. And the shortage of labour after the great pestilence greatly stimulated sheep-farming ; for many manorial lords, finding themselves unable to get their fields cultivated, turned them into sheep-runs, which required only one-sixth of the labour. The resultant growth of export-trade greatly increased the yield of "The Great and Ancient Custom" (§ 89), which now became a very important source of revenue to the Crown. To facilitate the collection of it, Edward III issued the *Ordinance of the Staple* (1354), which forbade the selling of wool to foreign merchants except at certain fixed markets, such as York, Lincoln, and Winchester. This enabled royal officers to assess and collect the tax upon a uniform system, and to encourage the trade by giving foreign merchants guarantees as to standards of quality and fairness of weighing. After the capture of Calais, the Staple was concentrated at that town.

Nor was this the only effect of the Black Death on the wool trade. In the dislocation of manorial life which it caused, many people took refuge in the towns ; but there they found employment barred by the *Craft Gilds*, which had grown up during the past half-century. These gilds were organisations something like the Merchant Gilds which we have already described (§ 85) ; but instead of including *all* the burgesses of a town they limited themselves to those engaged in a particular craft—the tailors, the dyers, the goldsmiths, and so on. They did not correspond to our trade unions, for they consisted not of wage-earners, but of masters. We have seen that in the Middle Ages people did not believe in free competition, and these gilds fixed prices, set standards of workmanship, and regulated the number of apprentices and journeymen (*i.e.* *journée-men*—workmen paid daily wages) that each might employ. They also protected their common interests. No one was eligible for membership until he had served for a prescribed period first as apprentice and then as journeyman ; and they made it impossible for any outsider to adopt their occupation. Thus, unemployed farm-workers who wandered into the town found themselves rigorously excluded from most trades ; but there was one which had never been organised into a gild—the spinning and weaving of wool. To this, therefore, many of them betook themselves, the usual method being for a merchant called a "clothier" to supply them with raw material and pay them at "piece-work" rates for their produce. This was the humble origin of the wool manufacture which was later to become one of the chief bases of our national economic life. Edward III encouraged it by bringing over Flemish weavers to impart a knowledge of their craft, and English wool soon began to earn a reputation for high quality on the Continent. Still, this was only a gradual development ; the greater part of the raw wool was exported to Flanders for a century and more.

Yet another of our national activities which began in this reign was overseas trade. Up to this time trade between England and the Continent had been almost entirely in the hands of foreign merchants—the Germans of the Hanseatic League (an association of commercial towns in northern Germany)—who had a great warehouse in London known as the Steelyard ; and

the Italians, who imported spices and other Oriental luxuries and also acted as bankers (whence the fact that the financial headquarters of the world is to this day called "Lombard Street"). But the English were now beginning to show trading and seafaring instincts. The Cinque Ports, Southampton, Hull, and Lynn were becoming busy ports, able to supply ships for the transport of the King's armies across the Channel. They also developed the art of sea-fighting in self-defence, for there were no navies to police the seas in those days. The victory which these English ships won at Sluys gave them command of the narrow seas, and the generation that followed took full advantage of it. They gained much from the transference of the Staple to Calais, as this meant that the wool was carried thither in English ships instead of in those of the foreign merchants who had hitherto come to England to fetch it. The defeat off Rochelle brought their monopoly to an end, but by this time the seafaring habit had become ingrained; and the jealous opposition of the Hanseatic League was countered by a Company of Merchant Adventurers who obtained a royal charter and organised English commercial enterprise in foreign parts. The Italians lost their financial supremacy at about the same time. They had advanced Edward money for his French wars, but he ruined them by repudiating the debt, and a group of English merchants (headed by one Michael de la Pole of Hull) stepped into the breach.

### 109. *Wycliffe Attacks the Church's Wealth*

By the end of the reign of Edward III all the distinctive features of the Middle Ages were beginning to decay: feudal service, the manorial system, above all the conception of a universal Church binding Christendom together under the Pope. For the Papacy had forfeited its claim to universality when it moved its headquarters to Avignon in the midst of the dominions of the King of France; and although Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1377, an even worse evil now befell the Church. Upon his death (1378) the French cardinals refused to accept the successor chosen by the Italian Cardinals (Urban VI) and elected a Pope of their own (Clement VII), who took up his



residence at Avignon. Thus, "The Babylonish Captivity" was succeeded by *The Great Schism*. For the next forty years there were always two rival popes, each claiming to be the sole representative of Christ on earth, and each denouncing the other as an impostor. This state of things was disastrous to the authority of the Church as a whole and greatly encouraged the attacks upon her wealth, her privileges, and her claims to be independent of State control. Such criticism had long been heard from time to time; but it was *John Wycliffe* (1320-1384) who first focused them into a revolt.

We know little of his early life beyond the facts that he was a north countryman who studied at Oxford, where he became Master of Balliol Hall, and that he afterwards combined this position with that of Rector of Lutterworth in Leicestershire. About 1370 he began to teach and write in favour of the disendowment of the Church. Wealth was still pouring into her lap, in spite of Mortmain (§ 87), chiefly through bequests from penitents who hoped thus to gain forgiveness for their sins; and as most of this property escaped the payment of feudal dues, the result was the impoverishment of the State and increased burdens of taxation upon the rest of the community. What afflicted Wycliffe more than this was the resultant injury to the character of the clergy themselves: far too much of their energies was expended in gaining and administering worldly goods. He wanted to see priests live like the apostles of old, caring for nothing but their spiritual duties. He therefore proposed that this accumulated wealth should be given back to the families of the donors. These views were being discussed just at the time when the government was under the influence of John of Gaunt. They suited him and his clique very well, and he sent for Wycliffe to come and expound them in London. The bishops rallied to the defence of their endowments. Under the leadership of William of Wykeham they defied the great Duke by summoning the preacher before them on a charge of heresy. They dared not proceed to extremities, however, and Wycliffe was eventually allowed to return to Oxford.

110. *Wycliffe Attacks the Church's Doctrines*

But further study and meditation only made him the more convinced that the Church had taken the wrong road since the early days of Christianity; and he now began to attack not merely her worldly preoccupations and pretensions, but also her doctrines. His views on matters of detail all followed from his insistence that religion was an inward experience of the soul rather than a matter of outward forms and ceremonies. He felt that "orders" and ranks in the hierarchy were worthless distinctions; there was only one "rule" that mattered, and that was binding on all men alike. Pilgrimages and penances and ritual had been invented by priests as pretexts to wring money from laymen. The chief duty of the priesthood was to call sinners to repentance, and this could be done by preaching rather than by sacraments. And the Church's doctrine as to "transubstantiation" (that the priest by means of a ceremony turns wine and bread into the Blood and Body of Christ) he declared to be a delusion designed to enhance the personal importance of the clergy. All that really happened at the Mass was that the consecrated elements were charged with a purely spiritual blessing to those who received them. Furthermore, priests should not mix themselves in worldly affairs by becoming ministers of State. The Papacy itself was merely a human institution, and papal bulls and excommunications were therefore null and void: Christ needed no representative on earth, for He is always here, the ever-present Head of His Church. Lastly, God's message to mankind was contained in the Bible, which must therefore be translated into the mother tongue so that it might be understood by all.

These ideas were taken up with enthusiasm at the university where Wycliffe had been the central figure for twenty years. Oxford was at this time the most vigorous and independent centre of thought in Christendom, for it was not like Paris under the shadow of a royal palace, and it was a hundred miles from the seat of its bishopric (Lincoln). The bishops were therefore seriously perturbed by its acceptance of the new teachings, and they set up a renewed attack upon Wycliffe. His doctrines were

declared to be heretical, and his followers were ordered to recant. Bowing before the storm, he left Oxford and spent the rest of his days at Lutterworth. Just before his death, a year or two later, he made some sort of recantation, but the wording of it is so involved that no one can make out exactly what it means. The movement he had started went on, however. He had instituted a band of "Poor Preachers," and these continued to go about the country half secretly. Their converts became known as "Lollards"; we shall have more to say of them hereafter.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *Account for the English military success during the earlier part of Edward IIP's reign, and the failure during the latter part of it.*

(2) *What signs were there that medieval civilisation was beginning to decay in the reign of Edward III?*

in the week, was useless for the care of sheep or pigs, for instance. This work had once been done by bondmen, but actual slavery had been abolished—largely through the influence of the Church—within a hundred years of the Norman Conquest. Such skilled work as ploughing, again, was not likely to be well-done by an unwilling serf with his own half-starved oxen. For both these purposes the lord's bailiff would prefer to employ paid labour—to convert service-rents into money-rents which could be expended in paying wages to hired labourers. Thus, an increasing proportion of the population gained a certain degree of liberty, but they continued to be subject to many of the restrictions of serfdom—they could not leave the manor, they had to pay dues when they sold a pig or married off a daughter, they had to bring their corn to the lord's mill, and they could not claim against their lord in the law-courts. With the gradual growth of ideas about personal liberty these badges of servitude were more and more resented.

This was the general situation when the mighty shock of the Black Death fell upon the land. The value of labour was raised by its scarcity. The penalties which the Statute of Labourers (§ 104) imposed on all who demanded higher wages were repeatedly increased, and they remained a grievous threat to the peasant's life and limb; but they could not be consistently enforced, for the lords themselves were impelled to break the law by their urgent need to get their fields cultivated. Thus, the villein's aspirations for liberty were intensified by seeing his free neighbours able to exact a fancy price for their labour. Many serfs fled from their homes; and it was very difficult to recapture them, for the bailiffs on distant manors were eager to employ them, while if they could maintain themselves in a borough for a year and a day they were legally entitled to enfranchisement.

The lower classes of townsfolk had their own grievances too. The gild system (§ 108) made it very difficult for the journeyman to set up in business and often made it impossible for the casual worker to find work at all. London, in particular, was full of "unemployed"—"have-nots" who were savagely yearning for a chance to despoil the "haves"; and great resentment was felt against the immigrant Flemings and

Lombards (§ 108), who "were taking the bread out of the mouths of Englishmen."

Thus, by about 1380 the humbler classes both in town and country were seething with suppressed indignation and excitement. Ideas of human equality were in every mouth, especially in the form of the famous catchword, "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?" In many places this vague communism was stirred up by the preaching of priests, such as the famous John Ball. The principles of Wycliffe, broadcast about the country by his "Poor Preachers," seemed to point in the same direction, though he himself denied that they lent any support to rebellion. With so much combustible material about, a mere spark was all that was required to start a mighty conflagration roaring across the country.

### 112. *The Peasants' Revolt*

The ministers who took over the government in the name of the little Richard II found the exchequer almost bankrupt. The French war had begun again; nothing particular happened in it, but this futile muddling was quite as expensive as the most brilliant success would have been. In 1379 the government tried the desperate expedient of a poll-tax, which would tap new sources of revenue—particularly the peasantry, who escaped the ordinary taxes. Every village had to produce one shilling for each inhabitant over the age of fifteen. An attempt was made to arrange that the rich paid more and the poor less than this average; but the amount exacted from the ordinary labouring man must have been at least equivalent to a week's wages. A tax-collector would find it very difficult to collect such a sum even to-day, and it was much harder then, when there was so little money about. It is not surprising, therefore, that the amount raised in 1381, when the second poll-tax in three years was imposed, produced much less than expected. A fresh batch of commissioners was sent round later in the year, with instructions to be much stricter; and this was the spark which lit the fires of rebellion.

The trouble began at Brentwood in Essex, where the commissioner was assaulted and driven back to London.

Apprehensive as to the results of their temerity, the villagers scattered in all directions inciting people to revolt. In Kent, on the very same day, an outbreak was provoked by a courtier who behaved in overbearing fashion when demanding the surrender of a runaway serf at Gravesend. Within twenty-four hours the whole of that county was in a state of insurrection, under the command of one Wat Tyler, a demagogue with a fine flow of inflammatory language and some knowledge of military organisation picked up in the French wars. The movement might have been checked if the Council had taken steps promptly, but the members seemed paralysed with fear. By the end of three days the rebels were in possession of all the roads into London, and the only resource left to the government was to ask for a parley with their leaders. This took place at a spot called Mile End on the Essex Road. There the King and his ministers made a complete surrender—serfdom was to be abolished everywhere on payment of a rent of fourpence an acre. Clerks were at once set to work drawing up charters of emancipation and pardons for all who had taken part in the disturbances.

But the longer disorder goes on the more does the lower element in it take control. While this settlement was being discussed at Mile End, the residue of the mob had stormed the Tower and had brutally murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chancellor. The government were still unable to make any attempt at resistance; they merely arranged another colloquy for the morrow—this time at Smithfield, a space partly enclosed by houses just outside Aldersgate. Thither the rebels gathered to meet their young King on Saturday, June 15. Wat Tyler acted as spokesman and rode forward alone to state his demands to the group of courtiers who sat on horseback round the King. Exactly what followed is not clearly recorded; but Tyler appears to have got into dispute with some member of the Court and to have been struck from his horse and killed by the Mayor of London. When the mob realised what had happened they began to advance tumultuously, and the royal party was threatened with utter destruction. But the gallant young King (now aged fifteen) spurred his horse forward, shouting, "This Tyler was a traitor; I will be your leader!" At the sight of the handsome lad, in whose good will and good faith they had

as yet no reason to doubt, riding up to them so confidently, the rebels were touched; the spirit of resistance died out of their hearts, and they broke into cheers. That was the end of the rising. Within twenty-four hours complete order had been restored in London, and the peasants were all tramping homeward full of hope and confidence.

If the story had ended here it would have been one of the most picturesque and attractive in English history; but unfortunately it had an ugly sequel. The young King's fair words and promises were a mere *ruse de guerre*. The rebels dispersed and the danger past, the government proceeded to take their revenge for their recent humiliations with shameful disregard of their pledges; for, as we have remarked before, the chivalry of the day was a purely "class" feeling—it did not oblige gentlemen to behave decently to "the lower orders." Armed forces were now hastily organised and sent to hunt down the retreating peasants; while the King himself went on a sort of "Bloody Assize" through the home counties, in the course of which hundreds of the ex-rebels were hanged, including the famous John Ball. To a deputation of serfs who reminded him of his promises the young King threw off all disguise. "Serfs you were, and serfs you will remain," he exclaimed, and had them driven away.

The actual effects of the movement were almost nil. As we have seen, the natural course of events was already bringing about the emancipation which the peasants demanded; the rising did not either accelerate the process or retard it.

### 113. *Another Baronial Oligarchy*

From this point King Richard began to take an active part in the government. The quick-witted courage he had shown at Smithfield gave hope that he would develop into a wise and firm ruler. But these hopes were only fulfilled up to a point. His character lacked stability—he was too self-centred and too impulsive to steer a definite and consistent course; and these weaknesses eventually brought disaster both upon himself and upon his country.

He began by flouting the authority of Parliament, dismissing

Anne of Bohemia, who was herself favourably inclined towards the new views.\* In 1395 he paid a visit to Ireland, which had long been drifting back into chaos. He took an imposing retinue and a considerable body of troops ; but his object was to impress his Irish subjects rather than to subdue them by arms ; and he won their favour by enforcing justice, improving the administration, and granting a general amnesty to all who had acted against the government.

Then, quite suddenly, he showed that all this time he had been secretly nursing old hatreds in his heart and had been awaiting his opportunity for revenge on his enemies. He had Gloucester arrested and murdered in prison ; another of the former Lords Appellant was executed, a third deprived of rank and property ; and early in the following year (1398) he found an excuse for ridding himself of the other two. These were the Dukes of Norfolk and Hereford, the latter being the son and heir of John of Gaunt. Hereford had accused Norfolk of treason, and it had been arranged that the issue between them should be fought out by personal combat in the presence of the King. But just as the fight was about to begin Richard announced that he had decided to take the matter into his own hands ; Norfolk was to be exiled for life and Hereford for six years.

### 115. *The Lancastrian Revolution*

For the moment the King's triumph was complete ; and it might have been permanent had he not allowed it to turn his head. Unfortunately for himself and for England he used his newly won freedom of action to plunge into a mad whirl of freakish and irresponsible tyranny. He squandered money on wanton luxury, and raised the necessary funds by all manner of unlawful methods. He demanded forced loans ; he allowed his household to exact "purveyances," which ruined the countryside wherever the Court went ; he declared that seventeen counties had collectively committed treason by supporting the Lords Appellant ten years before, and imposed on them a fine which he

\* It was members of her suite who carried Wycliffe's doctrines to Bohemia, where they led to the famous Hussite movement at the beginning of the next century.



humorously called *Le Pleasaunce*, because he could assess it as he liked. He threatened in violent language anybody who ventured to demur at these proceedings. Within a year of his *coup d'état* he had alienated both his Council and the nation.

Then came a crowning act of folly. When "old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster" died in 1399 (his end hastened, it was said, by grief at the banishment of his son), the King seized all the vast Lancastrian estates and declared Hereford an exile for life. There had been no suggestion in 1398 that Hereford had forfeited his property or that he had done anything since to incur such a penalty; and if Richard had not completely lost his mental balance he would have realised that such an act—against his own cousin, be it remembered—would make every landowner in England anxious for his own property and ready to seize the first opportunity of removing the cause of that anxiety. And he chose this particular moment to pay another visit to Ireland!

Within a month he learned that Henry of Lancaster had landed in Yorkshire with a party of friends, and that all the north of England had risen to support him. Owing to contrary winds, the news was six weeks old when it reached Richard, and lack of shipping delayed his return for several weeks more. By the time he arrived in England he was too late. Barons and bishops all over the country had declared for Lancaster; and Richard at once abandoned all hope of making a fight for his crown. He surrendered to his cousin at Conway Castle, and was taken to London.

At first Lancaster treated him with respect. He had declared to a great assembly of magnates at Doncaster that he did not aim at the throne for himself but was come merely to claim his own property and to rescue the King from evil counsellors. He may or may not have been sincere in saying this; but it is certain that his friends and supporters had no intention of risking reprisals by allowing Richard to remain King; and they soon overcame any scruples Henry may originally have felt. Parliament was summoned and a document read before it which purported to be a formal abdication by the King, on the grounds that the writer had proved himself "insufficient and useless as a king." There is some doubt as to whether Richard really signed

this ; but Parliament asked no questions—it was too glad to be rid of him. Then followed a long list of his crimes—his severities against the Lords Appellent after they had received pardons, his unlawful taxes, his unjust sequestration of the Lancaster estates, and so on. This having been read, Henry stepped forward and formally claimed the crown. Not a word was said about the little children of the Earl of March ; but in this matter, again, Parliament eagerly acquiesced in a usurpation that would place a man of action on the throne.

As for the ex-King, he was lodged in the Tower, and nobody save his gaolers ever saw him again alive. His body was exhibited in St. Paul's Cathedral in the following March as a proof that he was dead ; and it was generally believed that he had been starved to death. If ever a man was the author of his own destruction it was he. He might have been amongst the most popular and successful of English kings, for he was highly intelligent, handsome, courageous, and, on the whole, well-disposed. But capricious self-will distorted his good qualities at critical moments in his career, and this sort of thing can be more unbearable in a ruler than downright bloodthirsty tyranny.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *Compare the career of Richard II with that of Edward II.*
- (2) *How far was the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 due to the Black Death ?*

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Lancastrian Usurpation

(1399-1414)

*In this chapter we shall see the formation of English nationality furthered by the general adoption of a common speech and by a rapid extension in the power of Parliament. The former was the outcome of a long process, and was permanent in its effects ; the latter was merely the result of the revolution of 1399, and was followed by a reaction half a century later.*

#### 116. *The Birth of Our Mother Tongue*

The emergence of the English nation was signalised in the latter half of the fourteenth century by the development of the English language and the birth of English literature. Ever since the accession of Edward the Confessor in 1042 French had been the language of the ruling classes. There was not, and never had been, a national Anglo-Saxon language—different Teutonic dialects were spoken in different parts of the country, and to a Northumbrian the speech of a Kentishman was almost as foreign as French. Even when national parliaments began to meet they conducted their business in French, as the only tongue which all members could understand (though probably few of the burgesses could speak it with any fluency).

To be sure, the position had been somewhat altered by the loss of the Angevin Empire, but to “speeke the Frenshe of Stratford-atte-Bowe” continued to be the hall-mark of breeding for another 150 years. Indeed, as time went on there was an increase in the bilingual class that lay between the French-speakers and the English-speakers ; for the growth of national

patriotism made the nobles feel less in common with their social equals across the Channel and more in common with their humbler fellow-Englishmen at home ; while the social ambitions of the middle-class folk made them imitate their " betters."

Then came the mighty cataclysm of the Black Death, which dislocated all the accustomed relationships of man with man. Priestly offices, high and low, had to be filled hurriedly, almost at random, by men of inferior culture ; and upper-class children could no longer be educated by French-speaking " clerks." Moreover, the war in France made men feel that there was something unnatural in using the speech of the national enemy. The educated classes tended more and more to use native words and grammatical forms, and within a generation a new language had come into existence—an amalgam of Romance and Teutonic tongues, but different from either of its constituent elements. So quickly did it develop when once the process had begun, that as early as 1362 a statute was passed making English the language of the Law Courts. By the end of the century the change was complete. French remained a secondary language at the Court for two centuries to come, but Henry IV spoke English as his mother-tongue and actually took the coronation oath in it. Whereas Crécy (1346) was won by a bilingual army, the " happy few " who fought at Agincourt (1415) were as united in speech as in spirit.

The new language was almost immediately crystallised by becoming the medium of a great poet, for it was during that critical age of lingual transition, the reign of Richard II, that *Geoffrey Chaucer* (1340-1400), the father of English literature, was writing. He was employed by the government in several responsible offices, and went on diplomatic missions to France and Italy ; but behind this external life of affairs he lived the inner life of a man of letters. He began by studying and translating much of the French and Italian literature which had appeared during the past few generations ; but he soon began to produce original work of the highest class. The " *Canterbury Tales* " are a collection of stories supposed to be told by the members of a band of pilgrims to beguile a journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket. Chaucer was a pioneer of language ; he had nothing to guide him as to the use of words and poetical

rhythms, but his instinct was so true that his writings became a model for future English poets; and there was something typically English, too, about his freshness of observation both of scenery and of character, his joy in life, and his sense of humour.

Another famous poem was being written in the new language at about the same time—William Langland's "Vision of Piers Plowman"; but this was a very different type of work. It is a semi-religious, semi-satirical poem attacking the social evils of the time—the wrongs of the peasantry and the corruptions of the clergy. It made a great impression on contemporaries; but it was written in the old-fashioned alliterative verse which Chaucer was putting out of date, and so later generations neglected it. It is only in modern times that we have come to realise that it contains passages of rugged eloquence which place it on a level with anything ever written in that style.

### 117. *The Persecution of the Lollards*

There was nothing picturesque or attractive about the personality of Henry IV. He was merely a cautious, practical person, with plenty of common sense and self-control, and a shrewd eye for his own advantage; but these were precisely the qualities required by a man in his position. [Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, and doubly so that of a usurper. He had great difficulty in holding his own, in spite of all his watchfulness, tact, and energy; and he found himself compelled to make great concessions to nobles, to Parliament, and to the Church.]

The support of the last-named was easiest to buy—the price was merely a persecution of the Lollards. The name "Lollard" was given in derision to anti-clerical religious enthusiasts who "loll'd" (droned) psalm-tunes in their unauthorised worship. Amongst them were many who were not actually disciples of Wycliffe (§ 109). Disgust at the slackness, luxury, and wealth of the clergy took many forms, and was intensified by the contempt felt for the Papacy on account of the Babylonish Captivity and the Great Schism (§ 109). Some of the reformers merely neglected the Church's sacraments, others went further

and derided them. Archbishop Arundel, to whom more than to any other individual Henry owed his throne, was determined to grapple firmly with the menace, and the King had neither the power nor the will to gainsay him. It was a peculiar kink in Henry's hard-bitten, self-seeking character that he should have had a vein of sincere piety; he had been twice to the Holy Land in his younger days, and had led a minor crusade against the heathen of Lithuania. Moreover, Richard II had been notoriously sympathetic towards the Lollards, and it was an obvious move for the usurper to gain the favour of the Church by taking the opposite line.

One of his first acts, therefore, was to promote the famous statute *De Heretico Comburendo* (1401), which required sheriffs to punish persons convicted in the Church Courts of heresy by publicly burning them to death. Burning had long been the punishment for heresy in Continental countries, but it had never before been lawful in England. The act appears to have been intended chiefly as a warning and to have had the desired effect, for most of the Lollards saved themselves by recantation, and we hear of very few cases of execution by burning during the reign of Henry IV. The first of these was William Sawtre, a London rector, who adhered steadfastly to his denial of transubstantiation and was burned in Smithfield, "chained standing in a barrel packed round with faggots." Another of the early martyrs of protestantism was a journeyman-tailor named Badby, who was withdrawn from the flames by order of the young Prince of Wales because his cries of agony sounded like a recantation, but thrust back into them again when he proved to be staunch.

Yet we must beware how we blame such persecutions. We must always remember that in the Middle Ages it seemed as impossible for men to put themselves outside the Church as it would seem to-day for men to put themselves outside the State. What Wycliffe aimed at was a reform of the Church—it would never have occurred to him to try to set up an independent religious organisation. And we must also bear in mind that the English Church could not have adopted the reforms he advocated even if it had wanted to, for the monks and friars who formed more than half of its clergy were not subject to the authority of the bishops, but only to that of the Pope.

118. *Rebellions*

Almost everything of importance that happened during the reign was the outcome, direct or indirect, of the King's unstable position on the throne. Most clearly is this true of the rebellions which form the main theme of Shakespeare's plays about his reign. To satisfy the adventurers who had backed his claims he was obliged to part with Crown lands which had hitherto brought in revenue to the exchequer; and this weakened his position in two ways: it allowed magnates to consolidate semi-independent power in particular districts (as, for instance, the Percies in Northumberland and the Nevilles in the west country); and it deprived him of the means for keeping such over-powerful subjects in check.

The most obvious prop for a usurping dynasty was a successful war. Henry was too short of money to be able to take an expeditionary force overseas, so he had to content himself with a cheap substitute—an attack on Scotland in support of the old claim to suzerainty. This was a doleful failure. The Scots declined either to do homage or to fight; and after a futile raid the invaders had to retire for lack of provender. In the following year the Scots made a retaliatory raid under Archibald, Earl of Douglas; but as they were retiring laden with loot they were intercepted at *Homildon Hill* (1402) by a strong force which had been collected by the Percies. The Scots were completely defeated, and many prisoners (including Douglas himself) fell into the hands of the victors.

Then followed a revolt in Wales. Owen Glendower, a descendant of Llewelyn the Great, quarrelled with an English neighbour; and when refused justice by the government, took the law into his own hands. So greatly had the English monarchy lost in prestige owing to the Lancastrian usurpation, that this private vendetta quickly swelled into a serious national rebellion. Henry's efforts to crush it were crippled by his poverty, and the Welsh skilfully evaded a decisive issue among their mountains. In 1402 Glendower captured Edmund Mortimer, chief of the English marcher-lords. Henry had long distrusted Mortimer, and he now declined to pay his ransom; but this action only

brought him further trouble. Glendower made an alliance with his prisoner, and the Percies (who were related to Mortimer by marriage) threw in their lot with the rebels. These Percies had for some time been quarrelling with the King over their share of the spoils of Homildon Hill. They now imitated Glendower by making an alliance with their principal prisoner of war; and Douglas took part with them in a dash through England to join forces with Glendower. Had they succeeded, King Henry would have been in grave danger of losing his crown, and perhaps his life; but by a swift march and a skilful piece of strategy—the best bit of soldiering he ever achieved—he cut off the intruders at *Shrewsbury* (1403), where Hotspur (son of the Duke of Northumberland, the head of the Percy family) and Douglas were both killed and their forces dispersed. Glendower had meantime overrun South Wales, but from this moment the tide of success began to turn against him. The King's son and heir, afterwards Henry V, conducted a series of masterly campaigns which drove him gradually back into the northern part of the principality, where he died—still in rebellion—in 1416.

King Henry thought it wise to overlook the part that Northumberland had played in the Shrewsbury campaign, but the slippery Duke returned evil for good by fomenting yet another revolt, this time in conjunction with Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham, and Archbishop Scrope of York. This movement collapsed almost before it had got under way. Northumberland managed to escape to Scotland (only to fall the following year at Bramham Moor while leading a Scottish raid); but Mowbray and Scrope were caught and executed. The King was able to make his peace with the Church for beheading the archbishop by a mere apology to the Pope; which is striking evidence of how far the Papacy had fallen in prestige since the days of Becket.

### 119. "*The Lancastrian Experiment*"

Perhaps the most remarkable effect of Henry's seizure of the throne was that it led to a rapid growth of the power of Parliament. }



We have seen (§ 89) that the object of the early Plantagenets in summoning parliaments was mainly the approval of taxes. But parliaments soon began to acquire another function. Kings had always given audience to their subjects from time to time for the airing of grievances ; and the idea naturally arose that the meeting of parliaments should serve that purpose as well. Out of this practice there slowly emerged two further ideas : (a) that the acceptance of taxes was more or less dependent on the redress of the grievances ; and (2) that it was advisable that members should consult together about their complaints (which usually had a good deal in common), so that they could " pool " their collective power of putting pressure on the King. Thus, the law-making capacity of Parliament was slowly emerging during the later Middle Ages, and the Lancastrian usurpation marked an important step in the process. Henry IV might declare that he claimed the throne by hereditary right confirmed by conquest, but as a matter of fact he was absolutely dependent on the support of Parliament. And what made this dependence the more complete was the fact that he was always in desperate need of money. His alienation of Crown lands to his chief supporters, the repeated rebellions against him, the ever-increasing cost of government, all made it utterly impossible for him to " live of his own." Moreover, his chief excuse for supplanting Richard II had been that King's unauthorised exactions, and it was impossible for him to imitate such methods without inviting a like fate. When, therefore, Parliament took him to task for requiring so much money, and refused to grant it except under humiliating conditions, he was compelled meekly to submit to their reproaches and demands—e.g. that grievances should be redressed before supplies were granted, and that his accounts should be audited so that the Houses might know that the money was spent on objects of which they approved.

These concessions made Parliament for the time being the paramount power in the State. But the *Lancastrian Experiment*, as modern historians call it, was foredoomed to failure, because fifteenth-century parliaments were too short and the members too ignorant of public affairs to be able to carry on the government effectively.

As we shall see in a later chapter, a great reaction against it set in after 1460. Nevertheless, the traditions established under the Lancastrian kings never died out of men's minds; and it was those traditions that made possible the claims of seventeenth-century parliamentarians to supremacy in the State. But by that time the classes represented in the Houses had become both richer and better educated than they were in the period of which we are now speaking.

### 120. *Henry the Fifth*

By 1408 Henry IV seemed to have triumphed over all his troubles. Glendower was being beaten back into his mountain home; the Scottish King had been captured while sailing through the North Sea and was now held as hostage for the good behaviour of his people; two generations of rebellious Percies had been slain; the Church had been gratified by anti-Lollard measures; the King had made an agreement with Parliament as to rights and powers. But in the hour of success he was stricken by a deadlier foe than ever—disease. All John of Gaunt's descendants by his first wife seemed to have inherited some taint of ill-health, though his second family, the Beauforts, were sound enough. Henry henceforth became more and more disabled for the work of government, and in 1413 he sank to death at the early age of forty-six. It seemed like a judgment of Heaven on the regicide king that his last years were embittered by his son's heartless and unconcealed eagerness for the crown.

This son of his was a remarkable young man. He had been somewhat dissipated as a lad, but when he came to man's estate he turned over a new leaf, kept a tight hand over his passions, and concentrated all his energies on war and government. In appearance he was a spare, grim-looking, tight-lipped person, while in character he was cold-hearted, calculating, intelligent and hard-working.

The one thing that he was in earnest about—besides the urgent necessity for strengthening the hold of his dynasty on the kingship—was religion. He was a rigidly orthodox Catholic. Whereas his father had persecuted mildly, mainly for political reasons, he persecuted fiercely, as a fanatic. When

Prince of Wales he had personally supervised the burning of heretics ; as King his first act was to make a frontal attack on heresy by striking down the leaders of the movement. The most notable of these was Sir John Oldcastle, a brave soldier, a scholarly gentleman, and a personal friend of the late king's. Oldcastle was convicted of heresy and lodged in the Tower ; but escaping thence, he organised a general rising of Lollards as a protest against the persecution. This was quickly suppressed by the King at St. Giles' Fields, London (January 1414), when hundreds of prisoners were taken and executed. Oldcastle himself escaped and was only captured three years later in the west country, when he was first hanged as a traitor and then burned as a heretic. Lollardry disappeared as a result of this relentless persecution, but in the remoter parts of the country it continued to exist underground, until a century later it emerged to swell the great tide of anti-clerical feeling which had by that time arisen.

Having carried through what he regarded as his first duty, Henry proceeded at once to his second—the strengthening of his grip on the crown—by a military expedition to France. But that event opens a new chapter in English history.

#### QUESTIONS

- (1) *What were the results of the Lancastrian Usurpation ?*
- (2) *Write a short history of Lollardry.*

## CHAPTER XXV

### Glory and Humiliation in France

(1415-1452)

*Henry V was one of the ablest generals of mediæval history, and his brilliant victories in France strengthened the Lancastrian dynasty for the time. But after his premature death it became obvious that the conquest could not be permanent, and the humiliating reverses which followed completed the demoralisation of the English social and governmental systems.*

#### 121. "Fair Stood the Wind for France"

Henry IV had been well aware that the best means to make his usurpation popular would be a successful renewal of Edward III's invasion of France, but he had never been in a position to undertake it. *Henry V* did not suffer from these disadvantages, and was impelled to the venture by his love of fighting for its own sake, by an inborn conviction of his own capacity as a general, and by the peculiarly vulnerable condition of France at this moment.

France was suffering, as England did a little later, from having nobles of the blood royal who quarrelled among themselves for the right of wielding the royal power in the name of a weak-minded sovereign. Charles VI of France (the father-in-law of Henry IV) suffered from intermittent attacks of insanity, much as our Henry VI afterwards did. Of the two factions which struggled for power, the "Armagnacs," headed by the Duke of Orleans, were strongest in the south-west, while that headed by the Duke of Burgundy was supreme in the east—the

Duke, indeed, ruled much of the industrial Netherlands and was a prince of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as being a French grandee. The hostility between these parties became acute in 1407, when a Duke of Orleans had been murdered by a Duke of Burgundy; and in 1414 the Duke of Burgundy made an alliance with Henry V.

An enemy thus divided against itself seemed to Henry an opportunity not to be missed. Nor was this the only circumstance which gave him assurance of victory. The French had learnt nothing from their defeats at Crécy and Poitiers: they still relied for success in war upon heavy feudal cavalry. Indeed, the cavalry had become heavier than ever in the interim. To protect themselves against the long-bow which had worked such havoc among them in King Edward's time, knights had taken to wearing plates of steel over their chain-mail. Bit by bit, every part of the body had been thus encased, even the joints being protected by cunningly-devised sliding pieces. By the time he was fully equipped, the warrior was shut off from the outer world as completely as a man in a diving-dress, and was quite as helpless. He had to be hoisted into his saddle by two or three squires, and if he fell off he usually died of suffocation. He was unable to protect his horse in the same way, and had therefore taken to dismounting and going into battle on foot. He had sacrificed all power of rapid movement to his yearning for invulnerability—and in vain, for it was only at long range that his steel plates could resist an arrow discharged by "the limbs that were made in England." Henry's acute military instinct told him that his archers would have an even completer mastery over such foes than their ancestors had had at Crécy. He realised that he would be at a disadvantage if compelled to take the offensive, but he knew that the turbulent French aristocracy would never have the self-restraint to pursue Fabian tactics—they would charge in the old undisciplined way as soon as the armies faced each other for battle.

So in the summer of 1414 he set matters in motion by a polite request that Charles VI should forthwith hand over the kingdom of France to him as heir to the claims of Edward III. It seems incredible that he should have believed in the justice of his demand. Even if Edward III's claim had been indisputable, it

had passed not to Henry, the grandson of that king's third son, but to the Earl of March, who was grandson of his second son; for the fact that England had allowed the House of Lancaster to usurp the English throne could hardly be considered binding on France. Yet Henry repeatedly called God to witness that he had no thought of aggrandisement—he was merely moved by his love of right and justice; and we know that, whatever his shortcomings, he was no religious hypocrite. Such is the power of men to deceive themselves into thinking that whatever they want must be right.

Monstrous as the demand was, the French Government was so conscious of its own weakness that it made a soft answer in the hope of turning away wrath: it offered Henry most of the old Angevin provinces, and the hand of the French King's daughter Catherine, with an immense dowry. But Henry's object was not a mere diplomatic success. He raised his demands to an impossible height, and war was declared. The national spirit was roused to such a pitch of enthusiasm by the prospect of a renewed invasion of France that Parliament readily granted the King a subsidy equivalent to an income tax of three shillings in the pound.

### 122. *Agincourt*

Henry V was no romantic warrior-hero, drawing the sword recklessly and leaving the issue to chance. He made the most elaborate preparations for his campaign, collecting great magazines of military stores at Southampton and Calais. His method of raising troops showed how completely feudalism had died out in England as a system of military organisation. His force consisted of 24,000 archers, 8,000 mounted men-at-arms, and 1,000 engineers, all raised by contract and paid by the Government (each archer got about three times the wage of an artisan). The day before he was due to embark at Southampton he unearthed a plot, in which several members of his own immediate circle were involved, to place the young Earl of March on the throne. The conspirators having been tried and executed in quick time, he set sail on August 10, 1415, and landed two days later in the estuary of the Somme. His first business was to capture the port of Harfleur as a base from which to commence

the conquest of Normandy. The place made a stouter resistance than he had expected, however, and by the time he had gained possession of it and organised a garrison to defend it against counter-attack, the autumn was too far advanced for him to commence his Norman campaign. Wounds, sickness, and the necessity for leaving a garrison at Harfleur had reduced his numbers to 11,000, but he determined to march these round to Calais before the winter set in. Rations for eight days were carried, but Henry's calculations were put out by the fact that all the lower bridges and fords of the Somme were held in strength by the French, and he had to march many miles up the left bank before he could find a crossing. By the time he had done so he was sixteen days out from Harfleur, difficulties of commissariat had become acute, and he was aware that a large French army had gathered to cut him off from his destination. When the two forces came face to face near the village of *Agincourt* the disparity between them seemed almost laughable. The French were 30,000 strong, mostly heavy-armed horsemen, while the English now numbered no more than 6,000, of whom five-sixths were archers. It had been raining almost continuously for a fortnight, and the ground between the armies was a sodden ploughed field. The ponderous French knights dismounted from their horses and tried to march to the attack across this, with the result that they soon sank up to their knees in the soft earth. The English archers (many of whom had stripped to the waist for the sake of lightness of movement) closed round their helpless foes and slaughtered them at their leisure. At the end of that astounding afternoon the French had lost 10,000 men and the English 100.

The news was received with frenzies of joy in England, and it made the House of Lancaster firm upon the throne at last. During the next four years the King proceeded with a systematic conquest of Normandy. In 1419 it seemed for a moment as if the French factions would make up their quarrel and present a united front against him; but in the July of that year the Duke of Burgundy was murdered while on a visit to the Dauphin's camp, and thereafter the vast Burgundian power was more whole-heartedly than ever on the English side. The French Government was reduced to such straits by this closer

alliance between its enemies that it agreed to the *Treaty of Troyes* (1420), by which the Dauphin was disinherited and Henry (now married to the Princess Catherine) recognised as regent and heir to King Charles, who was by this time permanently insane. When a son was born to Henry and Catherine in 1421 it seemed as if this was the beginning of a dynasty for France as well as England. Henry V died a few weeks later, his frail physique worn out by the strain of constant warfare. When Charles VI also died within the same year, the throne of France was claimed on behalf of the little *Henry VI* of England, and the piecemeal conquest of French provinces went on under the late king's brother, the Duke of Bedford. Bedford proved himself as brilliant a commander and as capable an administrator as Henry V, and he was a far more genial personality. The French nobles contributed to his success by their stupidity; they went on fighting by the old methods, they continued to quarrel among themselves, their troops were demoralised by continual defeat, the Dauphin (as he was still called, even after Charles VI died in 1422) looked on helplessly while province after province was overrun. By 1428 the Anglo-Burgundians were in possession of three-fourths of France; the Dauphin's power was confined to the country round Poitiers and Bourges, and the only important fortress he still held was Orleans. For years he had spent the greater part of his exiguous revenue upon the fortifications of this place; if it fell into the hands of his enemies there would be nothing to prevent them from mastering all the rest of France. When he learnt that the English were making preparations to blockade it in strength, he had serious thoughts of giving up the struggle and taking refuge in Scotland or Spain.

### 123. *The Maid*

Then a miracle happened. A girl of eighteen came riding up to the Dauphin's headquarters and demanded to see him. Her name was Joan, and she was the daughter of a well-to-do peasant of Domrémy, in eastern France. She said that she had been repeatedly visited by saints who told her to save Orleans from the English and have the Dauphin crowned at Rheims (which was the traditional coronation-place of French kings,



but was situated in the heart of the Burgundian territory). It was a strange story ; but drowning men clutch at straws, and the Dauphin had little to lose by trying the experiment. He gave her command of his troops, and she soon infected them with her own faith and enthusiasm. Within a few days they had thrown off all their lassitude and " defeatism." Led by her they boldly attempted the impossible—and achieved it. The Maid attempted no subtleties of strategy or tactics—she simply led her men straight at their objective, and they were everywhere victorious. She saved Orleans; she took the Dauphin to Rheims and there had him crowned Charles VII, she defeated the English in a pitched battle for the first time in a century, at *Patay*. Her appointed task accomplished, she asked to be allowed to return to her native village, but the Court (though it only half-believed her story of visions) regarded her as a mascot too valuable to be discarded and persuaded her to remain. This meant undertaking tasks for which she felt no supernatural inspiration, and she was no longer so successful. She failed to capture Paris, and was eventually taken prisoner by the Burgundians, who sold her to Bedford for 10,000 pieces of gold. The English had long sought to excuse their discomfiture by alleging that she was, as Bedford said, " a disciple of the fiend that used enchantment and sorcery." They now brought her to trial for witchcraft before a court consisting of doctors of the University of Paris, presided over by the Bishop of Beauvais. She was found guilty and burned alive in the market-place of Rouen, Charles VII making not the least attempt to save her from a fate which she had incurred by preserving his kingdom. The whole episode, from her first appearance to her martyrdom, lasted barely two years.\*

But Saint Joan's work for France did not end in the flames at Rouen. Her simple-hearted faith and devotion had put the factious nobles to shame and had aroused a fervour of patriotism among the people. The English conquest of France which had once seemed inevitable soon seemed impossible. Bedford and his captains struggled on gallantly and contested every inch of the ground, but the tide of success had turned definitely and finally against them. Several factors contributed to their

\* Nearly four centuries later the Catholic Church canonised her (*i.e.* made her a saint).

# FRANCE in MARCH 1429



*Districts in the hands of the English . . .*

*Districts in the hands of the Burgundians.*

defeat. Firstly, as this second half of the Hundred Years' War went on it produced, just as the first half had done, French leaders with genius for small-scale warfare. The part that du Guesclin had played in the latter days of Edward III now fell to Dunois and La Hire. Profiting by experience, they refused to attack armies drawn up on their own ground and confined themselves to local operations by which they gradually wore away the English strength. Secondly, the advantage of weapons which had formerly lain with the long-bow shifted during the war to cannon, to the use of which the French adapted themselves much more readily than the English. Our archers were no longer able to await with confidence the attack of steel-clad horsemen—they were blown to pieces where they stood ; and it soon became evident that gunpowder had made it almost impossible for the English to defend the fortresses which they had taken so much pains to capture in the first decade of the war. Thirdly, the Anglo-Burgundian alliance was dissolved, partly through a personal quarrel between the Dukes of Burgundy and Bedford, and partly because the former magnate began to feel that he was on the losing side. In 1435 a peace conference broke down because the English refused to give up the claim that Henry VI was King of France, an empty title which English kings continued to use right down to 1802 ; whereupon the Duke of Burgundy made a private treaty with Charles VII. Paris was lost in 1436, and soon no part of France remained to England save Normandy and Guienne.

#### 124. “ *Livery and Maintenance* ”

Beneath all the local causes of the failure in France lay one that was much more far-reaching—the paralysis of the government in England.

Again and again we have seen that in the Middle Ages a strong central government was necessary for a country's well-being ; and that a government could only be strong when it was controlled by an able king with an adequate revenue. England at this juncture fulfilled neither of these conditions. Henry V had been succeeded by a two-year-old baby, and the nobles at once began to struggle to gain control of the government. Even

when Henry VI grew up it was apparent that he had inherited both the physical weakness of his father's family and the mental weakness of his mother's. A soft-spoken, kind-hearted, pious young man, he busied himself more in building Eton College and King's College, Cambridge (the most beautiful piece of late Gothic architecture in England) than in governing the country. As to the royal revenue, this had been insufficient for centuries and since Henry IV had given away half the Crown lands the Exchequer had fallen into a quagmire of debt and difficulty. The conquest of France had relieved the situation for a time, but the subsequent disasters there made it utterly impossible to carry on the home government efficiently.

This weakness removed all check on baronial turbulence, which had recently become a serious danger to the central power. Edward III had married his numerous sons to heiresses of great families, hoping by this means to raise up a group of nobles who would support the throne. The effect had been the very opposite of his intentions, for his descendants, proudly conscious of the royal blood in their veins, struggled amongst themselves for the crown, and in so doing dragged it in the mire. Outside the royal circle, too, great estates were becoming concentrated in the hands of a few great families. To take one famous example, the twenty-three children of Ralph Neville, made Earl of Westmoreland by Richard II, all made advantageous marriages, with the result that in the next generation nearly a quarter of the lay members of the House of Lords consisted of his descendants. Such a "clan" of landed aristocrats could defy any but the most vigorous and united central government, and that of Henry VI was neither vigorous nor united.

The result of all this was to call into existence a new and debased form of feudalism. The lesser landowners of a district, finding the King's government powerless to protect them from acts of violence by evil-disposed neighbours, would seek protection from some great noble. A legal document would be signed by which the magnate would promise to support the client, provided that the latter would lead his tenants to fight for him; and the magnate would give all those who thus took service under him a "livery," including a badge to be worn on

sleeve or breast. This system was known as *Livery and Maintenance*. It placed at the disposal of the greater nobles armed forces numbering hundreds, sometimes thousands; and the result was that the country was fast becoming a chaos of private warfare.

### 125. *York and Lancaster*

The increased power of Parliament now showed itself a curse to the country instead of a blessing. Elections fell under the influence of local magnates, and members came up to Westminster as nominees of a faction rather than representatives of a constituency.] So turbulent did the meetings become that in 1426 the government forbade members to come armed—so they brought clubs instead of swords, and the Parliament of that year became known as “The Parliament of Bats.”

Meanwhile, the quarrelling nobles gradually became polarised into two groups, which later developed into the parties of Lancaster and York. We can trace the cleavage between them far back into history. From the time when Earl Thomas of Lancaster led the Ordainers against Edward II (§ 99) the baronial opposition to the power of the Crown was always more or less connected with the House of Lancaster—we see it personified a little later by John of Gaunt, for instance. Richard II had tried to check it, but his deposition had actually placed the head of that House on the throne. This helps to explain why baronial independence was stimulated by the revolution of 1399; and why the classes which stood to profit by strong and orderly government—particularly the commercial and moneyed classes—began to draw together in opposition to the usurping dynasty. Agincourt made that dynasty popular for a few years, but the disasters which ensued made the division acuter than ever. All through the 'thirties and 'forties there raged a furious political strife between the parties on the question of the prosecution of the war. One faction, led by Henry IV's half-brother, Cardinal Beaufort,\* wanted to make peace on the best terms obtainable; the other, under Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester,\* Henry IV's youngest son, urged a more vigorous

\* See Genealogical Table, p. 226.

prosecution of the war until the conquest of France had been achieved. When these two protagonists died, within a few months of each other, in 1447, the Cardinal's place at the head of the peace-party was taken by the Dukes of Somerset and Suffolk, while the lead in the war party fell to Richard, Duke of York, who was himself a direct descendant of Edward III.\* The former party gained a powerful ally in 1444 when they arranged a marriage for the King with Margaret of Anjou, for the young Queen naturally threw herself into the "Lancastrian" cause, and proved a very vigorous and active partisan. For some years they contrived to keep control of the government, but they dared not affront the national pride by making peace on the humiliating terms which were all that the French were now willing to grant. Consequently, they were held responsible for the disasters which were falling thick and fast upon the English arms. The *Battle of Formigny* (1450), which sealed the fate of Normandy, was the immediate cause of a rebellion in Kent and Sussex under a leader named *Jack Cade*. This was not caused, like the Peasants' Revolt, by discontent against villeinage, for villeinage had by this time almost disappeared; its object was to obtain the dismissal and impeachment of the King's incompetent ministers. The movement was suppressed and Cade was hanged; but Suffolk was captured in the Channel by his political enemies while trying to escape to France, and was summarily beheaded across the gunwhale of the boat.

Such doings showed that the country was on the brink of civil war; and in the circumstances it is not surprising that the end soon came of the struggle in France. In 1451 the French were able to concentrate on the conquest of Guienne, which had been an English possession since the time of Henry II. At the battle of *Castillon* (1453) the last English army in France was destroyed, and with the fall of Bordeaux, three years later, the only scrap of the Plantagenet Empire which remained in English hands was Calais.

The Hundred Years' War thus brought to an end left a legacy of hostility between the English and French nations which lasted for four centuries, to their own great loss as well as that of western civilisation in general. In both countries it stimulated national

\* See Genealogical Table, p. 226.

## 266 GLORY AND HUMILIATION IN FRANCE

pride ; but in France this led to the establishment of a centralised monarchy as the only safeguard against disunion, while in England it fostered a turbulent spirit which led straight on to the Wars of the Roses.

### QUESTIONS

(1) *Account for the success of the invasion of France up to 1428, and its failure after that date.*

(2) *Trace the development in methods of warfare from the Norman Conquest to the end of the Hundred Years' War.*

## CHAPTER XXVI

### The Wars of the Roses

(1460-1485)

*The party divisions among the descendants of Edward III now issued in a civil war. This led to the establishment on the throne of Edward IV, who personified the Yorkist reaction against "The Lancastrian Experiment" and restored the power of the monarchy. And though his death was followed by another reversal of fortunes in the family struggle, the new Lancastrian King was in a position to carry on the Yorkist policy.*

#### 126. *The Prologue—St. Albans*

A breach such as that between the Yorkist and Lancastrian parties generally tends to widen; for each side gives the other fresh cause of offence, and mere party feeling blots out of men's minds the questions of principle with which the quarrel began. Moreover, in the case of the rival Roses \* the motive underlying the struggle changed as time went on. Originally, Yorkism was a protest against inefficient Lancastrian conduct of the French war; then it became an effort to take the control of the King's policy out of Lancastrian hands altogether; and in its last phase it became a resolve to bring the Lancastrian usurpation of the throne to an end in favour of the senior branch of the Plantagenet family.

A government conducting a war in which it does not believe is hardly likely to be very successful, and it was the disasters in France that first focused the opposition. The mild and good-natured Henry VI, under the influence of his strong-minded young Queen, supported the Duke of Somerset in office,

\* The two parties adopted white and red roses respectively as their badges in the course of the war—why or when nobody knows at all definitely.



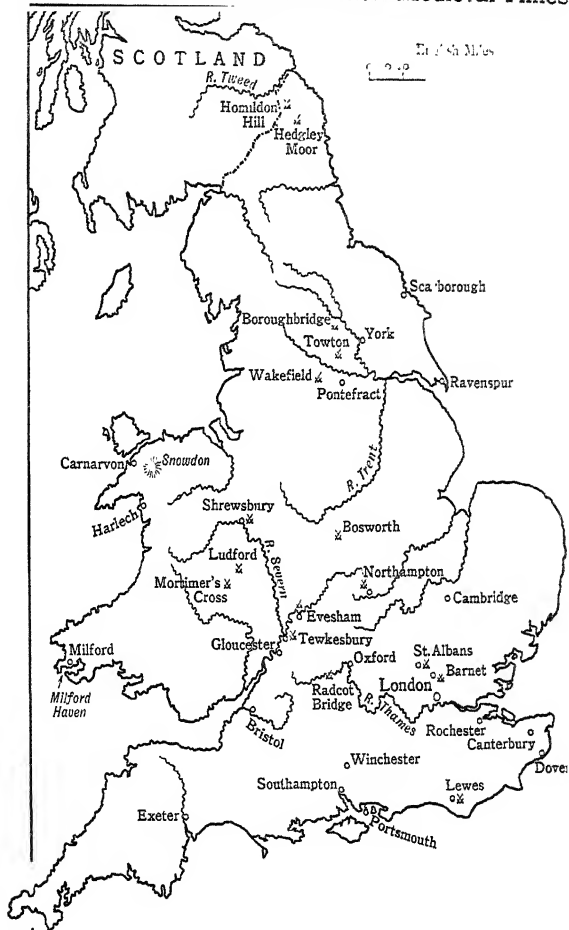
despite his growing unpopularity. Somerset was related to the King, and was suspected of aiming at the succession should Henry die without a direct heir—as seemed quite likely after seven years of childless marriage. It was upon this matter that the Yorkist majority in the Parliament of 1450 concentrated its attention, demanding that Richard, Duke of York, should be recognised as heir-apparent.

Two events during the latter part of that critical year 1453 threw the game into the hands of the Yorkists for the moment : (1) the final loss of Guienne tore from Somerset the last shreds of his credit as a minister, and he had to resign ; (2) the King went mad—unable to move or speak or feed himself—and a regent had to be appointed. In the circumstances this could only be the Duke of York ; and Parliament nominated him Protector of the Realm. He sent Somerset to the Tower, but otherwise refrained from any harshness towards the Lancastrian party. The question of the succession seemed to be settled by the birth of a son to the King and Queen soon afterwards, but this did not affect York's position as Regent, and he proved himself a capable ruler. Yet the Queen was furious at the overthrow of her party ; and a few months later another surprising turn of fortune's wheel came to her aid. The King recovered his wits—or at any rate enough of them to enable him to make some show of carrying through the functions of kingship. Margaret regained her control over the government, York's regency came to a summary conclusion, and Somerset was reinstated in office.

The net result of the episode was greatly to embitter party hatreds. The Queen followed up her triumph by summoning a meeting of her partisans "to provide for the safety of the King against his enemies." York knew what this meant—it was a threat to the very lives of himself and his friends. He therefore sent round to his supporters to concentrate their armed forces in self-defence. The Wars of the Roses had begun.

They were a strange form of civil war. For one thing, although the contest was always between a party in possession of the royal power and an opposition, the custom of "Livery and Maintenance" (§ 124) made it impossible for the former to raise a national army. Secondly, individual magnates changed

# ENGLAND & WALES in Later Medieval Times



sides freely, in accordance with their personal feelings and family interests. Thirdly, the fighting was confined to retainers and professional soldiers (many of them back from the French wars with no trade but fighting on which to live) hired by the nobles. The mass of the people watched the struggle with indifference or distaste, nor were they much molested by the combatants, who did not want to arouse public opinion against their respective parties. Lastly, they were not continuous. A few months of fighting would be followed by years of quiescence.

The contest opened with a trifling skirmish in the streets of *St. Albans*, when the Yorkists, marching on London, found their route blocked by the King's forces. The Yorkists won, largely owing to the military talents of the young *Earl of Warwick*, a member of the great Neville clan, who turned the Lancastrian position by a flank attack through the side-streets of the town. Many of the leading Lancastrian nobles were slain, including the Duke of Somerset, and the Duke of York became master of the situation. He treated the King with every respect; and did not even insist upon holding the chief place in the Council now that the incompetent Somerset was out of the way. Warwick became Governor of Calais, and gave fresh proof of his ability by putting a stop to the attacks of the French on English shipping and seaports, which had become common during the last few years. The King was pathetically anxious to prevent the effusion of any more Christian blood, and in 1458 he caused a great ceremony of reconciliation to be performed at St. Paul's, the Queen walking in procession hand-in-hand with York, and Warwick with the young Duke of Somerset. But it was all in vain. The high-spirited Queen plotted ceaselessly for a renewal of the war.

### 127. *The First Phase—Wakefield and Towton*

By the autumn of 1459 she felt strong enough to strike, and summoned the Lancastrian nobles to meet at Leicester. York now suffered for his magnanimity in allowing himself to be pushed into the background. He and Warwick were unable to rally their disheartened partisans; the handful that they managed to collect were dispersed at Ludford. The two leaders

had to flee the country, York taking refuge in Ireland and Warwick at Calais. The Queen then packed a Parliament with her own supporters and induced it to pass an Act of Attainder—a new weapon of partisan warfare, by which whole batches of opponents could be condemned to forfeiture and death without any form of trial, merely by an Act of Parliament.

We get a glimpse of the utter paralysis of the central government from the fact that York was able unmolested to make himself master of Ireland in the course of the following six months, and Warwick had an equally free hand at Calais. Both were men of exceptional vigour and ability, and by the middle of 1460 they were in a position to return in force, Warwick landing in Kent and York in Lancashire. Warwick defeated the King's forces at *Northampton*, and after the battle perpetrated the first of those wholesale slaughters of defeated opponents which followed almost every engagement for the rest of the war. The King fell once more into the hands of his enemies, while his Queen fled to Wales, where she took refuge with Owen Tudor, a Welsh gentleman who had married the widow of Henry V.

Then came an interlude of success for the Lancastrian cause. The Percies, who dominated the northern counties of England, were whole-hearted Lancastrians, and they collected forces sufficient to overwhelm the Duke of York at *Wakefield* (December, 1460), the Duke himself being amongst the slain. Furthermore, the Queen, having rallied her friends in the west, defeated Warwick in the *Second Battle of St. Albans*, and recaptured her husband.

But it was not long before the fortunes of war took yet another turn. Edward, Earl of March, the eldest son of the late Duke of York, was barely twenty years of age, but he already displayed brilliant capacities as a general. He defeated one Lancastrian army at *Mortimer's Cross* in February, 1461, and totally destroyed the main body of their supporters at *Towton* a month later. The slaughter was frightful. Such of the Lancastrian knights and nobles as did not fall in the actual fighting were beheaded afterwards, while Henry and Margaret fled to Scotland.

Elections to a new Parliament were now carried through under Yorkist control, and the body which assembled at Westminster was very different from that of the previous year. Its first act

was to declare the Earl of March *King Edward IV*, and its second was to pass an Act of Attainder against fourteen peers and a hundred other prominent members of the defeated party. The meek ex-King Henry was very glad to be relieved of the anxieties and responsibilities of the contest, but his proud Queen could not accept defeat so tamely. Twice she launched raids into England, but each of them was crushed and followed by wholesale executions, the final defeat being at *Hexham* in 1464. Two years later Henry was himself captured while wandering disguised in Lancashire, and was imprisoned in the Tower. The triumph of the White Rose seemed definite and final.

### 128. *The Second Phase—Barnet and Tewkesbury*

The new King enriched his supporters out of the estates of the defeated Lancastrians, and the lion's share fell naturally to the Earl of Warwick, who had played the principal part in placing him on the throne. Warwick became the most powerful subject in the realm, not merely by his wealth and rank, but by his domination over the Council. For Edward IV, though possessed of exceptional capacities both in politics and war, was too easy-going to have taste for the daily tasks of government. He was a big, jovial man with plenty of good spirits and good humour, but utterly devoid of moral sense, and the slave of his own sensual appetites.

The chief characteristic of his reign was the decline in the power of parliament. The wholesale confiscation of Lancastrian property, including the family possessions of the ex-King, made the Crown richer than it had been for a century, and there was now no foreign war draining the exchequer. Consequently, the chief source of parliamentary power—the financial dependence of the King's government—had dried up. Nobody felt it a grievance that Edward rarely summoned parliaments. It was a troublesome and thankless job to be a Member of Parliament in those days; knights sometimes ran away from the shire-courts for fear of being elected, and boroughs begged to be excused from the burden of having to send—and pay—representatives. The "Lancastrian Experiment" (§ 119) had been a disastrous failure, for the classes from which parlia-

ments were drawn were not yet fit to have control of government, and the weakness of the royal power led to ruinous anarchy. "Yorkism" as personified by Edward IV was a reaction against all this and a re-assertion of the power of the monarchy. This was the reason why it was always supported by the richer south-eastern part of the country, where people had most to lose by disorder, while the home of Lancastrianism was in the less populated north and west.

Towards 1470 the relations between Edward and Warwick became increasingly strained. The King's habitual indolence did not prevent his having his own ideas as to foreign policy, and these did not accord with Warwick's. Louis XI, the ablest of the architects of the French monarchy, was engaged in a great conflict with the most powerful of his vassals, the Duke of Burgundy. Warwick wanted to support Louis, but Edward preferred the traditional alliance with Burgundy, upon which depended the trade with the Flemish wool towns, now part of the Burgundian dominions. Edward was too indolent to make an open quarrel with the Earl—he preferred to pursue his objects underground. Warwick was even encouraged to go forward with negotiations for a marriage between Edward and a French princess—only to discover, when the negotiations were almost complete, that Edward had for some time been secretly married to Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of a Lancastrian noble. His mortification was intensified when the King began to shower estates and titles on his wife's relations and friends. It soon became clear that Edward was tired of being under the thumb of the great Earl and was intent on building up a group of personal supporters to counteract the domination of the Nevilles. Soon the breach became irreparable. Warwick felt that he had been shabbily treated, and determined to make an end of the régime which he had himself created.

At first it seemed as if his design would be successful. After some confused marching and fighting and intriguing, at one stage of which the King was a prisoner, while at another Warwick was a fugitive at Calais, Edward was forced to flee to Flanders. Warwick dragged the wretched old Henry VI out of the Tower, placed him on the throne, and proceeded to rule in his name (1470). But in the following year Edward

landed at Ravenspur with a force of mercenaries furnished for the most part by the Duke of Burgundy. The emergency called forth his latent capacity, and he overthrew his enemies in two sharp engagements. At *Barnet* in April, "The Kingmaker" was defeated and slain, and in May the west-country Lancastrians were annihilated at *Tewkesbury*, where the young son of Henry VI was killed. Henry himself was taken prisoner, and died soon afterwards—presumably by violence; though there is no direct evidence of this. Henceforward the only possible Lancastrian claimant to the throne was *Henry Tudor*, the young Earl of Richmond, who was descended from John of Gaunt through his Beaufort mother. In the circumstances it was not surprising that his friends felt that residence in England was not good for his health, and he was smuggled away to an exile in Brittany.

After this exciting episode Edward reigned unchallenged for twelve years more. In 1475 he embarked on a French war on behalf of Charles the Bold of Burgundy, but allowed himself to be bought off by Louis XI in consideration of a pension. This pension relieved him of any further need for parliaments and gave him the means of setting up an easy-going, genial sort of despotism. The only other noteworthy incident of this latter part of his reign was the Act of Attainder against his brother, the Duke of Clarence, for disaffection towards himself. The Duke died in prison, like so many inconvenient prisoners did in those days, but there is no real foundation for the story that he was "drowned in a butt of malmsey." In 1483 the King himself died, at the early age of forty-one, his health having been undermined by his licentious way of life.

### 129. *The Epilogue—Bosworth Field*

At the death of Edward IV, premature though it was, the House of York seemed to be secure upon the throne; yet within two years another change of dynasty occurred. His twelve-year-old son now became *Edward V*. The lad had been left to the care of his maternal relatives, but the late King's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, came with a troop of men-at-arms, had the guardians arrested, and took him into his own care.

This little *coup d'état* was quite a popular move, for the Woodville family were generally disliked. The situation was similar to that which had occurred at the death of Edward III (§ 107), but the difference in the outcome marks the decay that had come over medieval civilisation in the century since that event. The traditions of chivalry had restrained John of Gaunt from taking advantage of his nephew's youth ; but those traditions had now died out, and no other standards of conduct had replaced them.

Gloucester had already made some mark as administrator and soldier and was regarded as a devout Churchman ; he might have died with that reputation unsullied but for the fact that his brother's unexpected death had now placed the crown within his reach. The temptation to snatch it, whatever the cost in crime and shame, proved irresistible. His first step was to bribe some of the nobles to take his side and to execute without trial others who were certain to oppose him. His second was to lodge the King and his younger brother in the Tower. His third was to announce that as Edward IV had never been properly married to Elizabeth Woodville, their children were illegitimate, and that he (Gloucester) was therefore the rightful heir to the throne. His fourth was to have himself crowned *King Richard III*. His fifth was to have his little nephews murdered.

Perhaps he was moved to this last crime by the desire to "make assurance doubly sure," but its effect was to ruin the whole scheme. Richard himself must have quickly realised the folly of it. Even the men of the fifteenth century, the men who had taken part in the orgies of blood and cruelty that followed the battles of the Roses, were filled with disgust. Even the Duke of Buckingham, who had been Richard's chief accomplice as far as the fourth of the steps in usurpation just enumerated, protested when he heard of the fifth—and was forthwith beheaded. But no such severities could withstand the forces of reaction which gathered strength from day to day. Men who had been lifelong supporters of the Yorkist cause and had been personal friends of Edward IV joined in sending assurances of support to the only possible claimant to the throne—even though that claimant was a Lancastrian. This was the afore-mentioned Henry Tudor, Duke of Richmond, now



living at the court of Brittany. His hereditary claims were very slight; but the magnates of England could not afford to be particular about that, and the young man's cool, clear-headed astuteness made him a highly-efficient pretender to a throne. Soon his emissaries were going up and down the country arranging a rising. Richard knew of their intrigues, but was powerless to interfere, for no one would betray them. We get a vivid impression of his conscience-stricken fears from Sir Thomas More's famous "Life of King Richard III." "When he went abroad his eyes whirled about, his body was privily fenced, his hand ever on his dagger, his countenance and manner like one always ready to strike again. He took ill rest at nights, lay long waking and musing; sore wearied with care and watch, he slumbered rather than slept."

In August, 1485, Richmond set sail from Harfleur with men and money provided by his foreign hosts. He landed at Milford Haven—partly because his Welsh blood would gain him support there, and partly because he knew that he was expected to land elsewhere. He marched by way of Shrewsbury into the midlands, gathering strength as he went, but when he came face to face with the King at *Bosworth Field*, near Leicester, the royal forces outnumbered his own by two to one. But Richard's men hated the cause for which they were fighting, and when Lord Stanley, the King's own stepfather and the one magnate on whom he thought he could rely, joined in the battle on Richmond's side, the issue was decided. Richard was urged to flee while there was yet time, but whatever his crimes he did not lack courage:

"Nay, give me my battle-axe in my hand, sett the crowne of  
England on my head so high,  
For by Him that made both sea and land, King of England this  
day I will dye."

That "Crowne of England," battered in the fighting, was placed on Richmond's head after the battle, and he was proclaimed *King Henry VII*. A new age had begun in English history.

#### QUESTIONS

(1) *What were the political results of the birth of a son to Henry VI in 1453?*

(2) *Write a short history of Yorkism.*

## CHAPTER XXVII

### The Great Transition

*People sometimes call the Middle Ages unprogressive, but this is a great mistake. An age which, out of the chaos which followed the impact of the "barbarians" on the Roman Empire, produced the Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire, Feudalism, Chivalry, the Cathedrals, and the Gilds, cannot be called stagnant. But civilisations are living organisms: like plants and animals they have their birth, adolescence, maturity, decline, and death. Medieval civilisation had reached its highest development in the thirteenth century. In the fifteenth it was far gone in decay, while the chief features of our modern civilisation were already taking shape.*

#### 130. The Church Loses Grip

The central idea of the Middle Ages was the unity of Christendom under Pope and Emperor. The authority of the Emperors had always been shadowy, but the supremacy of the Catholic Church over men's thoughts and beliefs coloured every aspect of life. Yet by the beginning of the fifteenth century that supremacy was fading away. Few people went so far as to repudiate the Church's spiritual powers, but they began to ignore them in their actions and thoughts.

This was partly due to the loss of prestige which the Papacy had suffered. The Babylonish Captivity (§ 97) had placed the Holy See under the influence of successive kings of France and had robbed it of its reputation for impartiality. Then, when it had returned to Rome, there followed the Great Schism (§ 109), when there were two rival prelates claiming to be Pope at the same time. It is difficult for most of us to-day to realise what a

shock this was to men who believed that salvation depended on priestly powers which could only be bestowed by the true successor of St. Peter. Furthermore, when a Council of the Church met at Pisa (1409) to heal the breach, it chose a third Pope without being able to procure the resignation of the other two; and to make matters worse this third Pope, though a man of great ability in war and politics, had not the slightest claim to holiness—in fact, he was a retired pirate. Christian men could not feel towards such a man as towards Christ's representative on earth. It is true that the *Council of Constance* (1414–1418) eventually managed to end the Schism, and to choose a Pope (Martin V) who was acknowledged by all Christendom; but they could not wipe out the history of the past century.

And there was another matter in which the proceedings at Constance marked a decline in the moral power of the Church—the martyrdom of *John Huss*. Huss was a Bohemian who preached at Prague much the same doctrines as Wycliffe had taught at Oxford. He was excommunicated, but his hold over his fellow-countrymen was unshaken. The Council of Constance was as anxious to restore unity of doctrine as unity of authority, and Huss was induced to come and argue his case before it, on a promise of personal safety. But the doctors learned in the Canon Law who were gathered there decided that promises made to heretics were not binding, and Huss was burned at the stake. His supporters now broke out into armed rebellion, which Pope and Emperor could not suppress for decades.

A third Council, which met at Basel in 1431, lowered the prestige of the Church still further. It managed to make terms with the Hussites, but only because they had fallen out amongst themselves. It failed to deal effectively with the abuses within the Church, and devoted most of its energies to quarrelling with the Papacy itself. It claimed that General Councils had authority even over Popes, and when the reigning Pope resisted this claim it declared him deposed and set up a Pope of its own. But the sovereigns of Europe, appalled at the prospect of another Schism, would give no support to this proceeding, and in 1449 the Council was dissolved without having gained its point.

To outward appearance the Papacy had triumphed over all

the dangers which had beset it, yet it could never again unite Christendom under its moral sway. The Popes now became rulers of a considerable slice of territory round Rome, whereby they gained in stability and resources, but were dragged into self-seeking policies and wars like other temporal powers. And non-Italian peoples begrudged more than ever sending revenues to be spent in the support of an Italian principality. Thus, the mandates of the Papacy lost much of their old force. It might call for crusades, but nobody took much notice, even when in 1453 the encroaching Turks captured Constantinople, the mother-city of the Eastern Church.

This loss of prestige was shared by the clergy as a whole. There were still plenty of worthy priests, especially among the parish clergy; but the Black Death had greatly reduced the numbers and the standards of those who enjoyed the enormous wealth of the ecclesiastical foundations. The abuses against which Wycliffe had protested grew steadily worse all through the following century, and brought the clergy into almost universal contempt and dislike.

### 131. *Nationalism Replaces Feudalism*

The other great medieval institution, Feudalism, was also moribund.

As a military system it had never taken such firm root in England as elsewhere, and it had grown out of date here as early as Edward III's invasion of France. At Crécy a new form of army organisation—a national force inspired by patriotism and supported out of the royal exchequer—overwhelmed a force of magnates and their retainers held together merely by the fealty due to a feudal overlord. The old system lingered in France for a century longer than in England, but it was shattered at Agincourt. Thereafter the national spirit of France was evoked in opposition to this second English invasion, and the French began to realise that the only way to prevent the disunion which had encouraged that invasion was to rally round the King. Louis XI personified this new phase of the French monarchy. By means of cunning policy, inexhaustible industry, and a good deal of treachery, he managed to overcome all the obstacles to

the centralised power of the Crown, especially the opposition of Charles the Bold of Burgundy. A similar process of centralisation took place in Spain, hitherto a welter of feudal chaos. In 1469 the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon to Isabella of Castile gave the country a united monarchy strong enough to undertake the conquest of the southern part of the peninsula from the Moors who had occupied it for centuries. All Spaniards supported the joint sovereigns in this effort, and another national monarchy came into existence. Thus, whereas medieval Europe had been an agglomeration of municipalities and fiefs in which kings had great difficulty in making their authority felt outside their own estates, a new Europe was developing in which nations were under the direct government of monarchs.

The economic bonds of feudalism were likewise relaxing. The Black Death struck the system a blow from which it never really recovered. Serfs could no longer be kept tied to the manors, customary labour-rents could no longer be exacted from free cottagers (§ 111). The old medieval collectivism gradually gave place to a laxer type of organisation. Whereas feudal society had consisted of a number of little local groups, the population now began to re-sort itself out into nation-wide classes. We can see signs of this process as early as the Statute of Labourers (§ 104), which attempted to regulate the wages all over the country. By the end of the fifteenth century the lines of cleavage in the population had ceased to be perpendicular, between one manor or borough and another, and had become horizontal, between all merchants as a class and all labourers as a class, and so on. And it is obvious that this change was closely connected with the growth of national monarchies which we have just described.

### 132. *National Economic Policy*

Corresponding changes were going on in industry and commerce. Down to the time of Edward III kings had granted trading privileges to particular boroughs or guilds, but had taken little thought for the economic advantage of the nation as a whole. But during the following reign a new line of policy was struck out—an attempt to use governmental power to build up the

economic and military strength of the country at the expense of other countries ; and the methods adopted were destined to be followed by later generations of English statesmen, almost down to our own day.

(a) In 1381 the first *Navigation Act* was passed. In order "to increase the navy of England which is now greatly diminished, it is assented and accorded that none of the king's liege people do from henceforth ship any merchandise in going out or coming within the realm of England except in ships of the king's liegance," under penalty of forfeiture of the goods so shipped. This was the first of a series of Acts to the same purport, which were not finally repealed until 1849.

(b) In 1390 one of the officers of the Exchequer pointed out that, since neither gold nor silver is to be had in England unless it is imported from abroad, the merchandise of England ought to be so governed that money should flow into the country, and care should be taken that the value of imports should never exceed the value of exports. This desire to secure "a favourable balance of trade" afterwards became known as *The Mercantile Theory*, and it remained the mainspring of our commercial policy right down to the reign of Victoria.

(c) Several attempts were made at about the same time to revive corn-growing. As we have seen, the reduction of population by the Black Death had led many agriculturists to take to sheep-farming, but the government felt that arable farming ought to be maintained as the "backbone of the country." These attempts culminated in 1463 in what we may call the first *Corn Law*. The importation of foreign-grown wheat was prohibited until the price had risen above 6s. 8d. the quarter ; and this policy was pursued off and on until 1846.

We can trace a common object in all these regulations—the consolidation of national power under a national monarchy ; and it is noteworthy that the first two of them were passed to support a powerful commercial class which was now coming into existence. Trade had been almost entirely inter-municipal in the time of Edward I ; by the reign of Edward IV it had become international. And whereas under the early Plantagenets such international trade as went on had been in the hands of Jews and Lombards, under the later Plantagenets it

was carried on by English merchant princes, organised in great Companies such as the Mercers and the Grocers, housed in magnificent City Halls. The change was due partly to governmental action—the expulsion of the Jews by Edward I (§ 90), the ruin of the Italian bankers by Edward III (§ 108), and the regulations by which Edward IV caused much English wool to be kept in the country to serve as raw material for the growing manufacture of cloth. But it was also due largely to changed ideas as to the uses to which money could be put. People had hitherto for the most part exchanged produce within small self-contained areas; they now began to appreciate the power of *capital* to set industry and commerce going on a large scale. After the Black Death many landowners had ceased to try to cultivate their estates, and had given leases to tenant-farmers in exchange for money-rent; and cloth manufacture was developed by “clothiers,” who provided raw wool to cottage spinners and weavers (no longer fully employed in agriculture owing to sheep-farming) and paid them in cash for the cloth they made.

All this is an indication of the new social system. The individual is ceasing to have a fixed place in a little social “cell,” such as a borough or a manor, in which relations are regulated by custom and *esprit de corps*, and is becoming a unit in one of three broad classes into which the population is beginning to fall: labourers, capitalists, and landlords—those who exchange their labour for wages, those who exchange the use of their money for interest, and those who exchange the use of their land for rent. Feudal society, based on the relationship of persons, is giving place to modern society, which is based on the exchange of things.

Of course, the change was very gradual—dim traces of feudal ideas may be found even to-day; but if we compare the general structure of society in 1300 and in 1600 it will be obvious that a revolution has taken place in the position and outlook of the individual man.

### 133. *An Age of Incubation*

Old-fashioned people living in the fifteenth century must have felt that the world was going mad. The centres of gravity

round which life had revolved in "the good old days" had lost their pull. The Catholic faith was becoming contaminated by rabid superstitions—magic charms, witch-hunting, devil-worship. The general standard of conduct was falling to a deplorably low level. Serfs were leaving their manors to seek employment in towns, while landlords were turning their estates into sheep runs. The government collected taxes instead of demanding "aids," and sent round recruiting-officers instead of calling for feudal service. Extravagant fashions in food and dress were arising—garb of fantastic cut and hue, highly-spiced viands, beards dyed red or blue. Gothic architecture was being perverted by overloaded "ornament" and hideous gargoyles. A new pole of attraction was beginning to make its power felt: the love of money was taking the place in men's lives that had formerly been held by feudal loyalty and the sacraments of the Church.

But amidst these ruins of medieval civilisation the foundations of a new civilisation were being laid. The most important of these signs of a new age were the invention of printing and of paper. A primitive form of printing had long been practised in Asia, but Europe had never felt the need for it during the Middle Ages, when education was practically confined to the clergy. It was only in the middle of the fifteenth century that movable type, which can be distributed and used again, was first made (either by Gutenberg the German or Coster the Dutchman—there is some doubt as to priority). But this would have been almost useless without suitable material on which to print—hence the development of paper-making, another oriental craft hitherto neglected in the West.

Perhaps the chief reason why these twin-inventions developed so rapidly in the latter half of the century was that during the first half of it a vast amount of matter worth printing had come to light—the poetry, history, and philosophy of the Græco-Roman civilisation. During the Middle Ages, when men's ideas had been limited to their duties towards God and towards their overlord, these old manuscripts had been left forgotten in old monastery cupboards; but they were now being diligently sought out. This was particularly the case in Italy, where the movement was begun by Boccaccio and Petrarch, and was



stimulated by the fall of Constantinople (1453), which drove many Greek scholars to seek refuge elsewhere. The study of the writers of an age when men had sought beauty, truth, and wisdom with unfettered minds called a new world into existence—the Italian Renaissance; and the new inventions enabled it to spread far and wide. Printing reduced the cost of books to about one-tenth what it had been in the old days of hand-copying on parchment. A knowledge of reading and writing was thus brought within the reach of all except the very poorest, and education ceased to be a monopoly of the clergy. The consequences of this revolution were far more profound and far-reaching than any one could have foreseen at the time. Indeed, it is not too much to say that if all the paper in the world were to vanish our modern civilisation would vanish with it.

The Wars of the Roses made England very backward in the new culture. It was not until 1476 that *William Caxton* set up the first English printing press. He was a wealthy merchant long resident in Bruges, and it was there that he learnt the new craft. He took it up as a hobby, and eventually established a press of his own in Westminster, where he enjoyed the patronage of Edward IV and his court. His first production was a compilation of his own—"The Dictes or Sayings of the Philosophers."

#### 134. *Emancipation*

When we consider these changes in outlook and way of life as a whole, we find that we can sum them all up in one word—emancipation. Men were gaining freedom from restraint. The Prince becomes independent of the Emperor, the monk breaks his vows, the serf refuses to be tied to the soil, the merchant will no longer be bound by gild regulations. The individual was beginning to claim the right to enjoy his own life, to make his own way in the world, and to think his own thoughts, regardless of the rules of any corporation or of the time-honoured precepts of religion.

The dynamic urge which had impelled the Germanic races to be constantly moving from place to place, first in Central Europe and then within the bounds of the Roman Empire, and had later

driven the Norsemen to seek adventurous gain overseas, had produced the chaos which we call the Dark Ages. When medieval civilisation supervened, it won its way only by quelling this restless spirit of adventure—giving men definite doctrines to believe and limited spheres of action. But the spirit had never died out, and in the fifteenth century it was roused again and burst its bonds. The chief lesson that men learnt from the re-discovered Græco-Roman classics was to take a renewed interest in this world, instead of looking upon it as a mere preparation for eternity. The impact of this Græco-Roman “secularism” upon a civilisation already far gone in decay aroused the dormant “barbarianism” of the West European races, and produced the three main characteristics of our modern civilisation.

(1) *Individualism*—the breakdown of the corporate spirit which was such a salient feature of the Middle Ages (§ 85). The spread of education, the disappearance of serfdom, the rise of a protestant feeling exemplified by Lollards and Hussites, are all examples of this.

(2) *Materialism*—a feeling that what matters most is not to do the will of God in the station of life in which He has been pleased to place us, but to get as much as possible of the good things of this world in our possession. This attitude of mind has done much to raise the standard of living and to encourage the application of science to the practical use of mankind. The poorest person to-day would be appalled at the conditions in which a wealthy man was content to live in the Middle Ages when such things hardly seemed to matter.

(3) *Enterprise*—the love of grappling with difficulties of time and space, the feeling that “the world’s mine oyster.” In the external world this viking spirit has found vent in voyages of discovery and the labours of pioneers in the wild; while in the mental world it has led to the wonders of astronomy, geology, biology, and physics.

Thus, there are good and bad sides to our civilisation, as to every other; and like every other it will in time die out and give place to a successor. It is quite possible that the World War gave it a death-blow, like that which was given to the medieval civilisation by the Black Death. If so, we are

ourselves living in an age of transition corresponding to that of the fifteenth century which we have been considering in this chapter

## QUESTIONS

(1) *Can you find any parallel between conditions since the War and those which followed the Black Death?*

(2) *What is meant by saying that the fifteenth century was an age of emancipation?*

## GENERAL QUESTIONS ON BOOK III

- (1) *Write a short history of parliament during this period.*
- (2) *What evidence is there during this period that the power of the Papacy was declining?*
- (3) *Trace the economic revolution that took place during this*
- (4) *How far did the two parts of the Hundred Years' War run parallel courses?*
- (5) *How far do you blame Henry V for the misfortunes of his son's reign?*
- (7) *Illustrate the troubles which Edward III brought on England by his policy of building up the royal family by advantageous marriages.*
- (8) *Compare the Wars of the Roses with any other similar disturbances as to cause, course, and effect.*
- (9) *Write a short history of the Lancastrian Party, from Thomas of Lancaster to Henry Tudor.*
- (10) *What was "The Lancastrian Experiment," and why did it fail?*
- (11) *Trace the effects of the Hundred Years' War on English history.*
- (12) *Distinguish between the fundamental and the immediate causes of the Wars of the Roses.*
- (13) *Mention some salient points in which the condition of England in 1450 differed from that of modern times.*
- (14) *Would it be true to say that the Wars of the Roses were a struggle of passions rather than of principles?*
- (15) *What help did the parties in the Wars of the Roses get from outside England?*
- (16) *Illustrate the importance of the alliance between England and Burgundy, and that of France and Scotland during the later Middle Ages.*

# INDEX

- Aberconway, Treaty of, 194  
 Acre, 141  
 Acton Burnell, Statute of, 186  
 Agincourt, Battle of, 258, 279  
 Agriculture, 6, 35, 281-2  
 Aidan, St., 30, 40  
 Aids, 100, 108, 160  
 Albigenes, 162, 171  
 Alcuin, 37, 40  
 Alexander II, Pope, 102  
 Alexander III, King of Scotland, 195  
 Alfred, King, 49-53  
 Alphege, St., 64, 66  
 Amiens, Mise of, 165  
 Anglo-Saxons, 32-6, 56-7, 74-82  
 "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," 52, 68  
 Anjou, 86, 121, 127, 132, 144  
 Anne of Bohemia, Queen, 243  
 Anselm, St., 109-10, 115-6  
 Antioch, 112  
 Appellant, Lords, 242-3  
 Aquinas, Thomas, 175  
 Aquitaine, 120, 132-3, 137, 143, 197,  
     221, 223  
 Archers, 89-90, 200, 215-6, 262  
 Architecture, 147, 174, 263, 283  
 Arms, Assize of, 137, 154  
 Arthur, King, 26  
 Arthur, Prince, 137, 143-5  
 Ashdown, Battle of, 49  
 Assington, Battle of, 65  
 Athelstan, 58-9  
 Attainder, Acts of, 271-2  
 Augustine, St., 28  
 Aulus Plautius, 15  
 Austria, Duke of, 141-2  
 Avignon, 205, 218, 229  
 Avranches, 131  
  
 "Babylonish Captivity," 205, 230,  
     248, 277  
 Bacon, Roger, 179  
 Badby, 249  
 Ball, John, 236, 238  
 Balliol, John, 19  
 Bannockburn, Battle of, 206  
 Barnet, Battle of, 274  
 Basel, Council of, 278  
 Bath, 17  
 Beaufort, Cardinal, 204  
 Bec, 84, 103, 109  
 Becket, Thomas, 124-8, 247  
 Bede, The Venerable, 24, 37, 52  
 Bedford, Duke of, 259-60, 262  
 Benedict, St., 27, 61  
 "Benefit of Clergy," 125-176  
 Bensington, Battle of, 40  
 "Beowulf," 81  
  
 Bernard, St., 120  
 Black Death, 217, 235, 278, 280, 282  
 Black Prince, 219, 222-5  
 Boadicea, 16  
 Bologna, 175  
 Boniface, St., 37  
 Bordeaux, 219, 224, 265  
 Boroughbridge, Battle of, 207  
 Bosworth, Battle of, 276  
 Bouvines, Battle of, 153  
 Bramham Moor, Battle of, 251  
 Brétigny, Treaty of, 221  
 Brice, St. (Massacre), 64  
 Brittany, 137, 144, 274  
 Bruce, Robert, 196, 201, 206-7  
 Brunanburgh, Battle of, 59  
 Brythons, 10  
 Bulls, Papal, 103, 231  
 Burgh, Hubert de, 159-61  
 Burgundy, Duke of, 255-6, 259, 262,  
     273-4, 279  
 Burnell, Robert, 185  
  
 Cade, Jack, 265  
 Cædmon, 40, 82  
 Caen, 103, 215  
 Cæsar, Augustus, 14  
 Cæsar, Julius, 12-13  
 Calais, 216, 221, 224, 227, 229, 257-8,  
     265, 270, 273  
 Cambridge, 176, 263  
 Canterbury, 29, 37, 64, 66, 128, 133,  
     152  
 Canterbury, Archbishops of, 37, 61-2,  
     71, 91, 103, 109, 126, 143, 150-2,  
     198, 237  
 "Canterbury Tales," 247  
 Caratacus, 16  
 Carnarvon, 194-5  
 Cashel, Council of, 131  
 Castillon, Battle of, 265  
 Cathedrals, 174  
 Catherine of France, Queen, 257-9  
 Caxton, William, 283  
 Celts, 9-10, 18, 22, 25-6, 193  
 Celtic Church, 26-30, 45  
 Charlemagne, 39  
 Charles Martel, 39  
 Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy,  
     274, 279  
 Charles the Simple, King of France,  
     57, 59  
 Charles IV, King of France, 208  
 Charles V, King of France, 223  
 Charles VI, King of France, 255-6  
 Charles VII, King of France, 259-60,  
     262  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 247-8

- Charter, The Great, 153-6, 158, 166, 199  
 Chester, 25, 53, 98  
 Chippenham, Pact of, 50  
 Chivalry, 172, 238  
 Church, The Catholic, 27-30, 61, 66, 102-3, 109-10, 124-5, 151, 160, 162, 169, 186, 218, 229-31, 251, 277-9  
 Cinque Ports, 229  
*Circumspecte Agatis*, 187  
 Cistercians, 147, 172  
 Clare, *see* Strongbow  
 Claremont, Council of, 110-11  
 Clarence, Duke of, 274  
 Clarendon, Assize of, 134-6  
 Clarendon, Constitutions of, 126  
 Clement VII, Pope, 229  
*Clericis Laicos*, 198  
 Cluny, 61, 84  
 Cnut, King, 65-7, 75  
 Columba, St., 27  
 Combat, Trial by, 135-6  
 Commerce, 177, 227-9, 280-2  
 Common Law, 133  
 Commons, House of, 167, 190  
 Compurgation, 33-4  
 Confirmation of the Charters, 199  
 Constance, Council of, 278  
 Constantine, Emperor, 19  
 Constantine III, King of Scotland, 59  
 Constantinople, 20, 46, 279, 283  
 Conway, 195, 244  
 Cornwall, Richard, Duke of, 163  
 Coroners, 143  
 Council, The Great, 114, 142, 155, 163-4, 166, 188  
 Courts Christian, 125, 131  
 Crécy, Battle of, 215-6, 247, 279  
 Crusades, 110-2, 120, 138-41, 159, 163, 172, 175, 184  
 Cumberland, 119  
 Cunobelinus, 15  
 Curia Regis, 114, 124, 134, 154, 158  
 Custom, The Great and Ancient, 189, 227  
  
 Danes, 44-8, 56, 62, 64-8, 77, 96-7, 130  
 Danegeld, 63-4, 67, 75, 100, 105, 108  
 Danelaw, 50, 53-4  
 David (of Wales), 194  
 David I, King of Scotland, 119  
 David II, King of Scotland, 221  
*De Donis Conditionalibus*, 186  
*De Heretico Comburendo*, 249  
*De Tallagio non Concedendo*, 199  
 Deorham, Battle of, 25  
 Dermot of Leinster, 130  
 Dispenser, 207-8  
 Diocletian, Emperor, 19  
 Distrain of Knighthood, 187  
 Domesday Book, 104-5, 108, 136  
 Dominicans, 173  
 Douglas, Earl of, 250-1  
 Dublin, 130-1  
 Dunois, 262  
 Dunstan, St., 60-2  
  
 Ealdormen, 34  
 Edgar, King, 60  
 Edgar the Atheling, 72, 91, 95-6  
 Edmund, King, 59-60  
 Edmund "Ironside," King, 65  
 Edmund "Crookback," 197  
 Edmund, St., 49  
 Edred, King, 59  
 Edward the Atheling, 72  
 Edward the Confessor, 68-71  
 Edward the Elder, 53  
 Edward I, 165, 167-8, 183-202  
 Edward II, 202-11  
 Edward III, 211-25, 279-80  
 Edward IV, 271-4, 282  
 Edward V, 274-5  
 Edwin, Earl of Mercia, 72, 87, 95-6  
 Edwin, King of Northumbria, 29  
 Edwin Streona, 65  
 Edwy, King, 60-1  
 Egbert, King of Wessex, 42, 47  
 Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen, 120, 132-3  
 Eleanor of Provence, Queen, 161, 165  
 Elizabeth Woodville, Queen, 273  
 Ellandune, Battle of, 42  
 Emma of Normandy, 67-8  
 Empire, Holy Roman, 59, 109, 130, 163, 170, 213, 256  
 English Lan  
 Ethandune, Battle of, 50  
 Ethelbert, King of Kent, 29, 32  
 Ethelfled, Countess of Mercia, 53-4  
 Ethelred I, 49  
 Ethelred II (The Unready), 63-5  
 Ethelwulf, 47-8  
 Eton College, 263  
 Eustace, Count of Boulogne, 71  
 Evesham, Battle of, 167  
 Exeter, 96  
  
 Falaise, Treaty of, 133, 140, 195  
 Falkirk, Battle of, 200  
 Feudalism, 76-9, 83-4, 97-100, 135, 149, 160, 164, 184, 214, 257, 263, 279-80, 282  
 FitzPeter, Geoffrey, 149  
 Flamard, Ranulf, 108-10, 113  
 Flanders, 213, 227-8, 273  
 France, 51, 84, 98, 123, 129, 132-3, 137-8, 140-7, 153, 156, 158-9, 165, 184, 196-7, 205, 211-6, 218-9, 255, 262-5, 279  
 Franks, 20, 38, 58  
 Frederick II, Emperor, 160, 163  
 Forest Law, 104, 113

- Formigny, Battle of, 265  
 Franciscans, 173  
 Friars, 173  
 Fulford, Battle of, 87  
 Fyrd, The, 52, 80, 87, 108, 137, 214  
  
 Gaels, 10  
 Gascony, 146, 163, 184, 196-7, 199, 208, 223  
 Gaunt, John of, 224-7, 230, 242-8  
 Gaveston, Piers, 202-4  
 Geoffrey of Anjou, 117, 119  
 Geoffrey of Brittany, 132, 137  
 Gesiths, 33  
 Gilds, Craft, 229, 235  
 Gilds, Merchant, 177  
 Glaston, 60, 62  
 Glendower, Owen, 250-1  
 Gloucester, Humphrey, Duke of, 264  
 Gloucester, Richard, Duke of, *see* Richard III  
 Gloucester, Robert, Earl of, 120  
 Gloucester, Statute of, 185  
 Gloucester, Thomas, Earl of, 239, 243  
 Godwin, Earl, 67-71  
 "Good Parliament," 225  
 Gospatric, 96-7  
 Gothic Architecture, 147, 174, 263, 283  
 Grand Assize, 136  
 Gray, 151  
 Greenland, 46  
 Gregory the Great, Pope, 28, 52  
 Gregory VII, Pope, 86, 102, 110-1  
 Gregory IX, Pope, 160  
 Gregory XI, 229  
 Grosseteste, 162, 165  
 Gualo, Cardinal, 158  
 Guesclin, 222, 224  
 Guienne, 146, 262, 265  
 Gutenberg, 283  
 Guthrum, 50  
 Gyrth, Earl of E. Anglia, 72, 88  
  
 Hadrian, Emperor, 16-17  
 Halfden, 49  
 Halidon Hill, 212, 215  
 Hanseatic League, 228-9  
 Harding, Stephen, 147  
 Harold, King, 70-73, 84-90  
 Harold Hardrada, 87-8  
 Harold Harefoot, 67-8  
 Harthacnut, 68  
 Hastings, Battle of, 89  
 Heathfield, Battle of, 29  
 Henry I, 107, 113-6, 134  
 Henry II, 121, 130-8, 184, 195  
 Henry III, 158-68  
 Henry IV, 243-52, 264  
 Henry V, 253-6, 271  
 Henry VI, 259, 265, 267-8, 270-4  
 Henry, Duke of Normandy, 132, 137  
 Henry IV, Emperor, 110  
  
 Hereford, Earl of, 101  
 Hereford, Duke of, *see* Henry IV  
 Hereward the Wake, 97  
 Heptarchy, 39-42  
 Hildebrand, *see* Gregory VII  
 Homildon Hill, Battle of, 250  
 Hundreds, 34  
 Huscarles, 67, 87  
 Huss, John, 243, 278  
  
 Iberians, 5  
 Iceland, 46, 66  
 Impeachment, 225  
 Ine, King of Wessex, 33  
 Ingwar, 49  
 Innocent III, Pope, 150-1, 156, 160, 171  
 Innocent IV, Pope, 163, 173  
 Inquest of Sheriffs, 134  
 Inquisition, Holy, 171  
 Interdict, 127, 151-2  
 Investitures, 109  
 Ireland, 243-4  
 Isabella, Queen, 205, 208-10  
 Italy, 133  
  
 acquerie, 221  
 arrow, 37  
 erusalem, 112, 138, 140-1  
 ews, 190-2, 281-2  
 oan of Arc, 259-62  
 ohn, King, 132, 137-8  
 ohn, King of France, 219-20  
 umières, Robert of, 71  
 ury, 135-6  
 Justices in Eyre, 134, 188  
 Justinian, Emperor, 175, 184  
  
 King's College, 263  
 Kingston, Treaty of, 159  
 Knighthood, Distrainment of, 187  
  
 Labourers, Statute of, 218, 235, 280  
 Lancaster, Thomas, Earl of, 207-8  
 Lancaster, John, Duke of, *see* Gaunt  
 "Lancastrian Experiment," 252, 272  
 Lancastrian Party, 244, 264-76  
 Lancastrian Revolution, 243-4, 258  
 Lanfranc, 84-5, 101, 103, 105, 109-10  
 Langland, William, 248  
 Langton, Archbishop, 151-4, 159  
 Leofric, Earl of Mercia, 70  
 Lewes, Battle of, 166  
 Lewes, Mise of, 166  
 Limoges, 224  
 Lincoln, 120, 227, 231  
 Livery and Maintenance, 263-4, 268  
 Llewelyn II, 164  
 Llewelyn the Great, 193  
 Lollards, 232, 248-9, 254  
 Lombards, 229, 281  
 London, 17, 63, 91, 142, 165, 177, 235, 254

- Longchamp, William, 142  
 Louis IV, King of France, 59  
 Louis VII, King of France, 120, 132  
 Louis VIII, King of France, 156  
 Louis IX, King of France, 165  
 Louis XI, King of France, 274, 279  
 Ludford, 270
- Macbeth, King of Scotland, 72  
 Malcolm, King of Scotland, 72, 87  
 Maine, 86, 144  
 Mandeville, Geoffrey de, 119-20  
 Manors, 78-9, 98, 100, 228-9, 234-6, 280  
 March, Earl of, 257  
 Margaret of Anjou, Queen, 265, 267-74  
 Matilda, Empress, 117-21  
 Megalithic Age, 7  
 Mercantile Theory, 281  
 Merchant Adventurers, Company of, 229  
 Merchant Gilds, 177  
 Monasticism, 27, 61, 130, 172
- Montfort, Simon de, 162-7  
 Morcar, Earl of Northumberland, 73, 87  
 Mortimer, Edmund, 250-1  
 Mortimer, Roger, 208-10  
 Mortimer's Cross, Battle of, 271  
 Muhammadans, 38, 111-2
- Navarrete, Battle of, 223  
 Navigation Act, 281  
 Nectansmere, Battle of, 40  
 Neolithic Age, 5  
 Neville, 250, 263, 273  
 Neville's Cross, 217  
 New Forest, 104  
 Nicea, 112  
 Norfolk, Duke of, 243  
 Norfolk, Earl of, 101, 199  
 Normans, 57, 69, 71, 83-4, 89-91, 102, 147, 196  
 Normandy, 64-5, 67, 83, 107-8, 137, 143, 215, 258, 262, 265  
 Norham Castle, 196  
 Norsemen, 44, 57, 62  
 Northallerton, 119  
 Northampton, Battle of, 271  
 Northampton, Treaty of, 209  
 Northumberland, Duke of, 250-1  
 Northumbria, 29-30, 39-40, 42, 49, 53-4, 73, 96-7, 133
- Odo, Bishop, 101, 108  
 Offa, King of Mercia, 39  
 Olaf Trygvason, 63  
 Oldcastle, Sir John, 254  
 Ordainers, The Lords, 202-4  
 Ordeal, 135-6
- Orleans, 259-60  
 Orleans, Duke of, 255-6  
 Oswald, King of Northumbria, 29  
 Oswy, King of Northumbria, 30, 40  
 Otto the Great, King of Germany, 59, 170  
 Otto IV, Emperor, 153  
 Oxford, 162, 166, 175, 230-32  
 Oxford, Earl of, 239, 242  
 Oxford, Provisions of, 164
- Paleolithic Man, 4  
 Papacy, 28, 38-9, 86, 102-3, 116, 127, 129, 150-2, 156, 158-60, 162-3, 170, 205, 208, 229, 231, 248, 278-9  
 Paper, 283  
 Paris, 175, 231, 260  
 Paris, Treaty of, 164  
 Parliament, 166-7, 188-9, 251-3, 264  
 Parliament, The Good, 225 [272  
 Parliament, The Mad, 164  
 Parliament, The Merciless, 239  
 Parliament, The Model, 190, 197  
 Paschal II, Pope, 116  
 Patay, Battle of, 260  
 Patrick, St., 26  
 Paulinus, 29  
 Peasants' Revolt, 236-8  
 Pedro the Cruel, King of Castile, 223  
 Pembroke, Clare, Earl of, 130, 193  
 Pembroke, Marshall, Earl of, 158-9, 193  
 Penda, King of Mercia, 29, 40  
 Perrers, Alice, 225  
 Percy, 250-1, 271  
 Peter the Hermit, 111  
 Philip Augustus, King of France, 137-8, 141, 144-7  
 Philip IV, King of France, 106-7, 205  
 Philip VI, King of France, 212-3, 216  
 Picts, 22, 27  
 Pisa, Council of, 278  
 Pleasaunce, Le, 244  
 Poitiers, Battle of, 219-20  
 Pole, Michael de la, 224, 239  
 Ponthieu, 221  
 Poor Preachers, 232, 236  
 Præmunire, Statute of, 218, 242  
 Printing, 283  
 Provisions, 160  
 Provisors, 218, 242  
 Purveyances, 243
- Quia Emptores*, 187  
*Quo Warranto*, 185
- Radcot Bridge, 241  
 Reliefs, 100  
 Rheims, 221, 259  
 Richard I, 137-9, 195  
 Richard II, 225-45  
 Richard III, 274-6



- Richmond, Henry, Duke of, 274-6  
 Robert, Duke of Normandy, 107-8,  
     112-3, 115  
 Rochelle, Battle of, 224, 227  
 Roches, Peter des, 158-61  
 Roches, William des, 144  
 Rollo, Duke of Normandy, 57  
 Roman Empire, Holy, *see* Empire  
 Roman Law, 133, 175, 184  
 Rome, 12-20, 27-9, 39, 49, 74, 76-77  
 Rouen, 260  
  
 Saladin, 141  
 Saladin Tithe, 138  
 Salisbury, 104, 198  
 St. Albans, 17  
 St. Albans, Battles of, 270-1  
 Sanctuary, Right of, 171  
 Sawtre, William, 249  
 Saxon Shore, Count of the, 19  
 Schism, The Great, 230, 248, 277  
 Scotland, 18, 27, 58, 132-3, 140, 195-8,  
     221, 250-1  
 Scrope, Archbishop of York, 251  
 Scutage, 134, 160  
 Senlac, Battle of, 88-90, 147  
 Serfs, 80, 146, 155, 234-6, 238, 280,  
     283  
 Sheriffs, 76, 100, 134, 136, 143  
 Shire-moots, 34  
 Shrewsbury, Battle of, 251  
 Sicily, 140, 160  
 Siward, Earl of Northumbria, 70  
 Sluys, Battle of, 213, 229  
 Southampton, 229, 257  
 Spain, 223, 280  
 Somerset, Duke of, 265, 268, 270  
 Stamford Bridge, Battle of, 88  
 Standard, Battle of the, 119  
 Staple, Ordinance of the, 227, 229  
 Steelyard, 228  
 Stephen, King, 112, 117-9  
 Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury,  
     71, 91, 95, 102  
 Stirling Bridge, Battle of, 199-200  
 Stonehenge, 9  
 Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, 130  
 Suetonius Paulinus, 16  
 Svein, King of Denmark, 63-5  
 Suffolk, Earl of, *see* Pole, Michael de  
     la  
 Suffolk, Duke of (William de la Pole),  
     265  
  
 Taillebourg, Battle of, 162  
  
 Tewkesbury, Battle of,  
 Theodore of Tarsus, 36  
 Thomas Aquinas, 175  
 Thweng, Robert, 160  
 Tinchebrai, Battle of, 115, 147  
  
 Tostig, 70, 87-8  
 Tours, Battle of, 39  
 Towton, Battle of, 271  
 Trastámara, Henry of, 223-4  
 Trial by Combat, 135  
 Trial by Jury, 136  
*Trinoda Necessitas*, 80  
 Truce of God, 171  
 Tyler, Wat, 237  
 Tyrell, Walter, 112  
 Tudor, *see* Richmond  
 Turks, 111  
  
 Universities, 174  
 Urban II, Pope, 111  
  
 Varangian Guard, 87, 96  
 Vere, Robert de, 239, 242  
 Vexin, The, 123  
 Vikings, 45-9, 62  
 Villeinage, 146-7, 234-6, 238, 265  
 Vortigern, 25  
  
 Wales, 33, 40, 58-9, 162, 193-5, 197,  
     209, 251-2  
 Wakefield, Battle of, 271  
 Wallace, 200-1  
 Walter, Hubert, 143  
 Waltham, Earl of Northampton, 95,  
     101  
 Wardship, 100  
 Warenne, Earl, 186  
 Warwick, Earl of, 270-4  
 Watling Street, 50  
 Wergilds, 33  
 Wessex, 33, 40, 49, 53, 56, 68, 71, 91,  
     113  
 Westminster, 69, 73, 87, 90  
 Westminster, First Statute of, 185  
 Westminster, Second Statute of, 186  
 Westminster, Third Statute of, 187  
 Westmoreland, Earl of, 263  
 Whitby, 30, 82  
 William I, 71-3, 83-91, 95-105  
 William II, 107-112  
 William the Lion, King of Scotland  
     133, 195  
 Winchester, 102, 104, 113, 120, 227  
 Winchester, Statute of, 227  
 Winwaed, Battle of, 40  
 Witanagemot, 34, 65-6, 73, 87, 91,  
     103  
 Woodville, Elizabeth, 273  
 Wool Trade, 227, 229, 282 †  
 Worms, Concordat of, 116  
 Wycliffe, John, 230-32, 238, 249, 279  
 Wykeham, William of, 230  
  
 York, 17, 96-7, 227  
 York, Archbishops of, 103, 127, 251  
 York, Richard, Duke of, 268-71  
 Yorkist Party, 264-70

